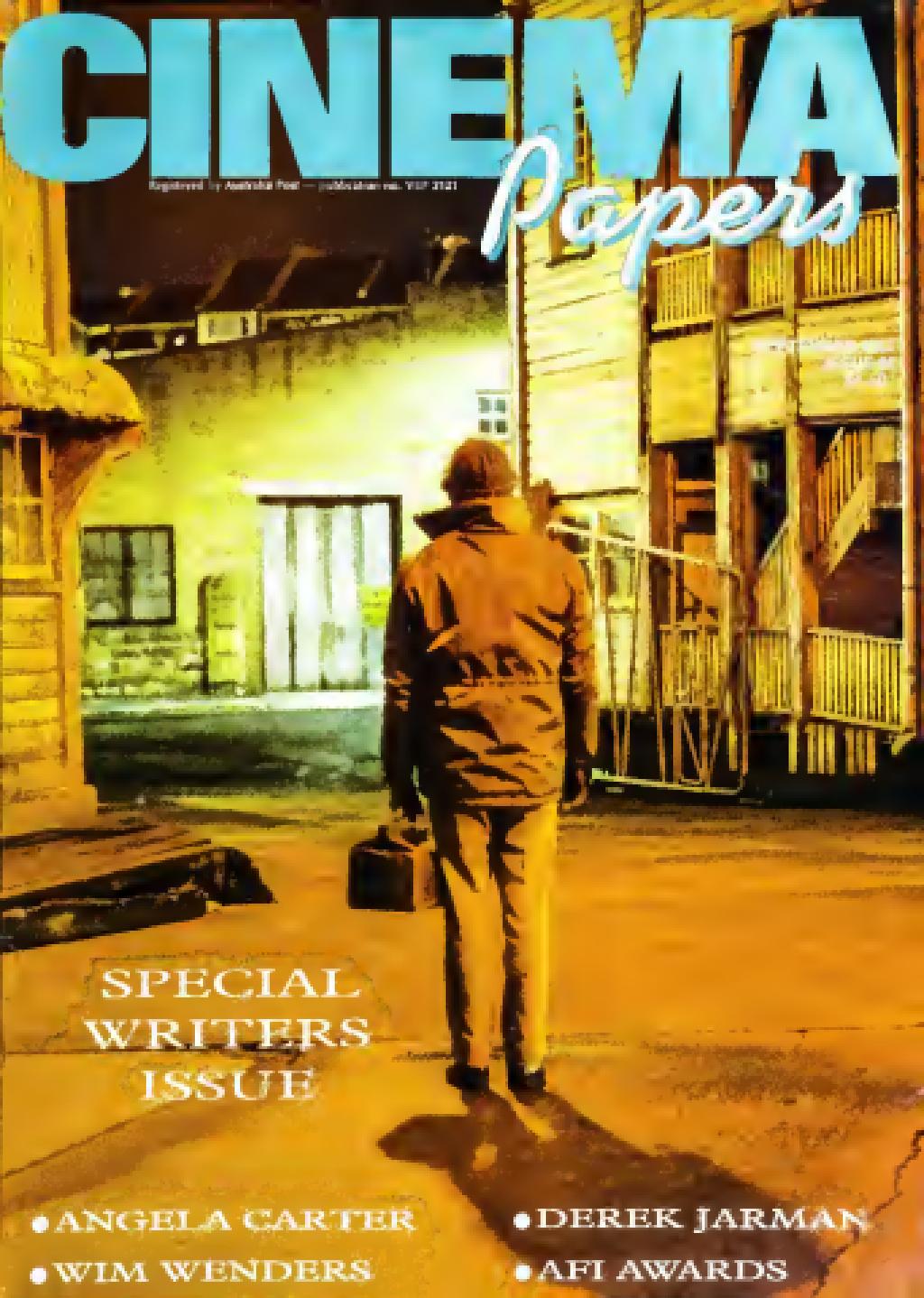


# CINEMA Papers

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**SPECIAL  
WRITERS  
ISSUE**

- ANGELA CARTER
- WIM WENDERS

- DEREK JARMAN
- AFI AWARDS

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# CINEMA Papers

## No 65

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# CONTENTS

## 4 BRIEFLY

## 6 AFI AWARDS: *The comedies*

10 *CHIP WITH THE LOT*: *Just like a Chip Decade*

12 *THIS JARMAN MAN*: *David Jarmain on art and money*

## FESTIVAL REPORTS

16 *JEAN-PIERRE GOREY*: *Steve Jobs, will travel*

22 *WIM WENDERS*: *The cream pie of desire*

23 *CHEN IS MISSING*: *Why the director didn't come*

## THE WRITE STUFF

24 *CRITICS ON SCREEN*: *Admiring by other means*

28 *THE STRONG SCRIPT*: *Who needs it?*

30 *NOVEL APPROACHES*: *Literature and the screen*

34 *TV TRAUMA*: *A surprising talk*

35 *GUSTAV HASPORD*: *Full visual book jacket*

36 *ANGELA CARTER*: *Magical and matter-of-fact*

40 *REVIEWS*: *One Sun, Another Predator, From The Hop, Garden Of Stone, Ground Zero, High Tide, La Bamba, Long Box Trilogy, Nightmare On Elm Street 3, The Place At The Corner, Raging Arizona, River's Edge, Stone, Wynd & Me, Pleasant, The Winter Of Sammick*

53 *BOOKS*: *Don't Shoot Darling, Love Is Colder Than Death*

60 *TECHNICALITIES*: *This and DAT*

64 *NEW ZEALAND*: *Money is the reason?*

65 *PRODUCTION REPORT*: *Buckley's chance with the miniseries*

66 *PRODUCTION SURVEY*: *What's making what in Australia*

73 *FUNDING DECISIONS*: *Who gets what*

76 *CENSORSHIP*: *May and June decisions*

80 *BACK PAGE*: *September and October film buff diary*

## A REPLY TO ANDREW WRIGHT AND GRAHAM SHELLEY

Graham Shelley and Andrew Wright, in their attack on the accuracy and validity of my research findings (Cinema Papers, July), seem to be working from indirect reports rather than from anything I have written myself. In particular they don't seem to have consulted my article 'Copyright sources for Australian drama and film', which is where I listed the results of my inquiries into the copyright application files held by the Australian Archives. This article was published in *Archives and Manuscripts* in November 1986.

There were a number of media reports, of varying accuracy, about my discoveries, but it is significant that Andrew and Graham have as a result rested their entire half-column to me what the research was and what it uncovered.

The Response of Copyright Proprietors and the correspondence associated with applications for copyright have been used by many scholars over the years. But when I arrived in Canberra early in 1986, the important part of the collection on copyright — the early-volente letters to the Commonwealth files (1901-1968) had disappeared. I accept that it could have been 'readily available' to Andrew Wright in 1983, however two successive Patent Office Librarians, working on the request of several historians, had read or seen to that file before during the first half of 1985. I rechecked the lost letters, and it has now been moved from Sydney and placed with the other copyright material in the Australian Archives. The implied claim that it was never lost is wrong.

The assertion that in my other discoveries I was only covering ground Andrew had covered three years earlier is also wrong. My research was based on the fact that these proved to be the last and last two parallel series of copyright files (plus a third series of unnumbered items). Previous searches for plays and filmscripts only found the application forms in the first of these series, (A13801) together with additional playscripts or filmscripts which were included in the same envelope. As I openly acknowledged in my *Archives and Manuscripts* article some of [the filmscripts] in the A13801 series have been assessed and compiled by other researchers (244).

However the Archives staff can confirm that I was the first person to systematically and thoroughly search a major portion of the collection, and to locate hundreds of scripts of performed Australian stage plays, some of which were the basis of later films, and a smaller number of original filmscripts. As these were too bulky to keep in the same envelope as the application forms, they were held in the 'Judy's' A13801 series. They could not have been previously rejected, for the simple reason that they had never been visually checked (indeed) by the Archive staff.

Richard Petherington

*Richard Petherington is editor-in-chief of my belief that the purpose of our article 'High Tide', Film Or Myth, was to explore the finding of a cache of play and filmscripts held by the Australian Archives Office. Our inserted evidence to do or do much in the location of such material, but in the end we left it out, as we felt it was not the article's purpose to do so. We are grateful for the positive response of our material or evidence with their interpretation of Australian screen history.*

Andrew Wright and Graham Shelley



■ The Shoots Creek volume on Australian shorts has been held over until the next issue.

■ The Australian Film Commission has approved an investment of \$100,000 in five short movies with Australian film and television production companies, under a new APC wage and program. The five companies are: Flaxton Films Limited (WA), Seven Stories Film Production (VIC), Simpson La Manna Film (VIC), Robinson, Cox and Carroll (NSW), and Tel Starline Productions (NSW). The APC's investment will be matched dollar for dollar by each company.

Flaxton Films (VIC), Simpson La Manna Film (VIC), Robinson, Cox and Carroll (NSW), and Tel Starline Productions (NSW). The APC's investment will be matched dollar for dollar by each company.

■ In the review of *The Screening Of Australia* in the July issue Ross Lunn's byline was omitted.

Dear AD: *Screen*,

In an otherwise fair article about the making of *High Tide* there was an unfortunate implication that Judy Davis took the script away and rewrite her character. This is incorrect. Laura Jones was the sole writer of the *High Tide* screenplay.

The producer, Sandra Levy, Laura and I encouraged and were delighted to have Judy's involvement during the final drafting of *High Tide*. She attended a couple of script sessions and was involved in some wonderful improvements of a number of scenes during the course of rehearsals. Many valuable ideas from these sessions were fed into our discussions back into the script.

I always like to encourage an atmosphere of creative collaboration during a production but I am a great supporter of the writer's role. I leave the rewriting to the writer.

Yours sincerely,  
Gillian Armstrong

*(NOTE: The article in question was a complete and accurate transcript of an interview with Gillian Armstrong.)*

## FASSBINDER COMPETITION

Cinema Papers has five copies of the Fassbinder biography by Robert Rote and Peter Bening to give away, courtesy of Australian Publishing Company. (Not review p52) Just answer our simple questions about Fassbinder's last three films. Send the answer to: Cinema Papers, 43 Charles Street, Abbotsford, Victoria 3000. Mail your envelope, 'Fassbinder Competition',



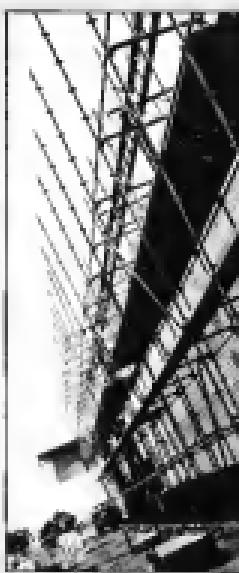
DALLAS: Three sides of the studio.

## DENIS DOES DALLAS

From per Potts, Texas on the map, Denis Thorpe just hopes that is all he has to say for Dallas, Victoria. He is chairman of Australian Film Studios Ltd., owners of the Fremantle and Mandurah studios, and the company behind a new studio complex in the Melbourne suburb of Dallas.

The complex, on the site of a former milk bottling plant, will have eight studios, workshops and production and administration offices. Space will be available for hire, from the whole studio to a few offices for pre-production. Fifty writer-producers will complement the media and provide on-site expertise during production. The business will include a plaster master, modelmaking, electronics, art binder and cutter.

Studio facilities will include a deep water studio, a water floor studio with rainmaking equipment and an animation studio.



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## THE PRIZEWINNERS — TRIVIA QUIZ, July 1987 issue p35

First prize (\$220 worth of CFC's Cinema Collection videos); Richard Cane. Runners up (The African Queen and South Pacific, courtesy CBSF Plus); Brenda Watson, Cinema Forum, Leslie Campbell, D. Lewis and Chris Mood.

### THE ANSWERS

1. Brett (Gasper), Bert (Roddy), Bert (Moore) and Bert (Collett).
2. Gordon Chater in the *Movie Showdown Show*.
3. Roy Rogers and Dale Evans. It was Trigger he had staffed, not Dale.
4. Ken.
5. Piano.
6. Green because he has Valentine blood. Something to get from his dad.
7. A duck... well a puppet that looked like a duck.
8. Five novels.
9. 312 Maple Drive.
10. PAB 1.
11. Baldwin Krausen in *The Showdowners*.
12. Linda.
13. To protect the innocent.
14. A humanistic. She used it to make mistakes.
15. Moon Watchung.
16. Subversiveness.
17. The street road in the Daily Planet building. Less frequently he used to

disappear down a back alley.

Never in a place worth.

18. Arnold Weinger.

19. Robert Taylor's

Detective and Mad Squad.

The solar was Tige Andrews

20. Jim Anderson from

Padre Kroc's Best sold

insurance. He wonder he was

such a bore.

21. Because his "uncle"

came from Mars in *My*

Portrait of Marcus

22. *2* *Victor 1* and *2* *Victor 2*

23. *Dr Who* in the many

glasses. He has only 13

transcenders, we are told.

24. Mr Eaton of *Lockinge*.

25. But when they need each

other most that's when

they're Buff 'n' Ready

26. Bailey and Spencer at *TF*

Second Strip. She was

*Sublime Fiction*

27. Howard.

28. Marcus Kart of the

*Topper* series and her dog

was Ned, a St Bernard.

29. Roger Cole.

30. He did driven a fire pole

then jumped onto the pacco

- The Australian National Documentary Conference will take place in Adelaide from 11 to 14 October. For more information, contact the conference organisers, via the South Australian Film Corporation, 113 Tuggeray's Hill Road, Hindmarsh, South Australia 5000.

# AFI AWARDS: THE CONTENDERS

Reading the article that appeared exactly one year ago in *Cinema Papers* ("The AFI Awards: into the Twilight Zone"), it is evident that 1987 has so far been kinder to the Australian Film Institute's endeavour to stage its annual awards than previous years have been. This time last year there were many doubts about the very future of the awards, the committee had neither a venue nor a budget, there were several significant films that didn't show up in competition and there were subtle grumblings about the sort of films that were honoured and the very judging procedures. The words – it is, indeed, there is a word prior – was for a while at least a remote possibility.

Though these remain areas of contention, the many changes to the structure and judging criteria of the awards that were implemented last year by AFI executive director Vicki Molloy, seem to have deflected the criticism that the awards are trivially casual and not up to the industry. Most outstanding is a query by the Screen Production Association of Australia over the inclusion of one of the most nominated films, *The Year My Voice Broke*, the AFI has taken steps to overcome the kinds of doubts that threatened that awards ceremony.

Amongst the changes, last year saw the best film judged by industry practitioners and the introduction of a new based judging criteria by the general membership of the AFI. Accredited industry practitioners rate in their area of expertise as well as for best film in the feature and non feature categories. Producers and directors are eligible to rate in all categories, of which there are now (beginning this year) screenplay, design, costume design, cinematography, editing, music, production design and sound. Through the introduction of pre-selection procedure accredited members only have to see the four films nominated in their particular area of speculation. According to Molloy, there are two main benefits of the changes: filmakers and industry personnel have much greater involvement in the judging of awards through the pre-selection panels composed of members of industry associations and guilds and the peer-group



TALE OF RUBY ROSE: Melina Juras and Chris Haywood



GROUND ZERO: Jack Thompson and Colin Peas

voting procedures. Unlike previous years where three practitioners often presented industry personnel from seeing all the films necessary for them to vote, now they need only see the four films that have been nominated in each category.

The newly introduced award is a special AFI honour given to most popular film and also includes non feature categories (short fiction, experimental, documentary and animated) which have also been pre-selected by panel. Some feature films have been entered. As well, there are TV awards for best television (for which 20 were entered) and mini-series (14 entered), judged by panel sitting in Sydney and Melbourne respectively and each composed of eight members.

According to Molloy, good attendance at the national screenings would seem to indicate that the streamlined procedures have affected a lot of active film practitioners and the changes she claims, have been very well

**Film Victoria congratulates all  
the 1987 AFI Award Nominees  
and is proud of its association  
with:**

**FEATHERS**  
**GROUND ZERO**  
**TO MARKET, TO MARKET**  
**PAINTING THE TOWN**  
**SLATE, WYN & ME**  
**THE TALE OF RUBY ROSE**  
**WARM NIGHTS ON A SLOW  
MOVING TRAIN**



**FILM VICTORIA-  
Best Performance in a Supporting Role.**



## THE YEAR MY VOICE BROKE: Louis Cerni and Big Manjusha

- **royal** The Anzac ceremony will be held at Melbourne's Palace Theatre on 9 October and will be televised on ABC-TV. The format of the ceremony is not yet known. Rob Pendleton (as producer and director) and Garry Buly (as executive producer) both known for their collaboration on live entertainment telecasts at *Quidnunc*, will produce the show.

However, the sure points of the year's awards stem from the presence of two films, and the absence of another. *The Year My Father Died*, it has been claimed, was ineligible for the feature film categories as it was made as part of a package of films for television. The film carries nominations for best film, direction and screenplay (John Carpenter), lesser peach Taylor Spreng (Lisee Cramond), supporting actor (John Goodman) and acting (Merle Thompson). Molloy confirmed, however, that "on the basis of information as provided by [the producer] Kennedy Miller, the film will remain in competition." The film, it seems, was made on *Screen* with Dolly sound on the understanding that its exhibitor would be sought if the film was suitable for commercial release. SVA President Ross Dinsney was anxious to have clear the contention, claiming the association "never sought clarification of the AFI's guidelines for the film's exhibitor."

# 1987 AUSTRALIAN FILM INSTITUTE AWARDS

## FEATURE FILM NOMINATIONS

<b>Best Film</b>	<b>Best achievement in costume design</b>
<i>Ground Zero</i>	<i>Rabbit</i> - George Ladd
<i>High Tide</i>	<i>The Face At The Case</i> - Anne Prentiss
<i>The Life Of Riley Rose</i>	<i>These Days Depressed</i> - Roger Reed
<i>The Man My Wife Hates</i>	<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - Jason Tye
<b>Best achievement in direction</b>	<b>Best achievement in cinematography</b>
<i>Ground Zero</i> - Michael Paterson and Roger Myhill	<i>Spikes</i> - Stephen Al Collyer
<i>High Tide</i> - Gillian Armstrong	<i>Ground Zero</i> - Wayne Dpection
<i>The Face Of Riley Rose</i> - Roger Schenck	<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - James Kallis
<i>The Man My Wife Hates</i> - John Douglas	<i>Worm People</i> - De A. Wim Arntz (not
<b>Best original screenplay</b>	<b>Music</b>
<i>Spikes</i> - Pamela Colman	<i>Ground Zero</i> - Wayne Dpection
<i>Ground Zero</i> - Alan Cudjoe and Ian Reid	<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - James Kallis
<i>High Tide</i> - Linda Jones	<i>Worm People</i> - De A. Wim Arntz (not
<i>The Man My Wife Hates</i> - John Dugan	<b>Visual effects</b>
<b>Best performance by an actress in a leading role</b>	<i>Spikes</i> - Stephen Al Collyer
<i>Ground Zero</i> - Diane Krall	<i>Ground Zero</i> - Wayne Dpection
<i>Spikes</i> - Muriel Smith - Lee Michaels	<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - Roger Reed
<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - Bryan Brown	<i>The Face Of Riley Rose</i> - Paul Schrader
<i>The Man My Wife Hates</i> - Hugh Tyrrell	<i>These Days Depressed</i> - Roger Reed
<b>Best performance by an actress in a supporting role</b>	<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - Cameron Alcott
<i>High Tide</i> - Judy Davis	<b>Best achievement in production design</b>
<i>Spikes</i> - Garry Fawcett - Wendy Hughes	<i>Rabbit</i> - George Ladd
<i>Ground Zero</i> - Robbie Benson	<i>Ground Zero</i> - Sean Thornton
<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - Steven Vidler	<i>The Face At The Case</i> - Cherry Fairman
<i>The Man My Wife Hates</i> - Lance Crouse	<b>Best achievement in sound</b>
<b>Best performance by an actress in a supporting role</b>	<b>Best film</b>
<i>Ground Zero</i> - Michael Paterson	<i>High Tide</i> - Tim Lloyd
<i>Spikes</i> - Robbie Benson	<i>Ground Zero</i> - Garry Fawcett - Mark Westhead
<i>The Umbrella Woman</i> - Steven Vidler	<i>The Face Of Riley Rose</i> - Roger Schenck
<i>The Man My Wife Hates</i> - Ian Aspinwall	<i>High Tide</i> - Peter Hogen
<b>Best performance by an actress in a supporting role</b>	<i>High Tide</i> - Peter Hogen
<i>Spikes</i> - Karen Pritchard	<i>These Days Depressed</i> - Tim Lloyd
<i>High Tide</i> - Ian Aspinwall	<i>Worm People</i> - De A. Wim Arntz
<i>High Tide</i> - Claudia Karvan	<i>Worm People</i> - De A. Wim Arntz

#### NON-FEATURE FILM NOMINATIONS

<b>Best documentary</b> Friends And Lovers How The West Was Lost Musical Masters (Mari Chet) Stringing the Hawk <b>Best drama</b> Cort In Your Face III Marty <b>Best experimental</b> Custard Non- Coloured Cells All That Silence Please <b>Best short fiction</b> Dumbfounded Dumb How To Be Dumb Nursery Poems By An Englishman Sex-education <b>Best achievement in direction</b> Audition - John Smithe How The West Was Lost - David Fincher The English Patient - Tony Scott Musical Masters - Liza Johnson <b>Best achievement in screenplay</b> How The West Was Lost - David Fincher Real Friends - Paul Thomas Anderson Musical Masters - Liza Johnson Silence And Noise - Catherine Hardwicke - Richard Linklater - Johnny Depp <b>Best achievement in cinematography</b> How The West Was Lost - Philip Null Musical Masters (Chris Chetti - checked Cutter Pleasure - Louise McNeely Silence Please - James Cahn <b>Best achievement in editing</b> Custard By Director - Murray Langston How The West Was Lost - Bruce Bozzi Rich Stott - <i>Maria Callas</i> Musical Masters (Chris Chetti - Steven Cahill - Bill Henson) <b>Best achievement in sound</b> Friends And Lovers - Kristin Kross Cort Landscape - Howard Sory, Gennar Hansen Musical Masters (Chris Chetti - David Mackay)
---

## Final Summary



Who is Chip Dexter, and what has he got to do with Andy Warhol, Lassie and a Canadian filmmaker working on his first feature script? JILLIAN BURT finds out the answer from

# GERALD L

**C**hing Dexter is a British boy reporter assigned to the television news team that the *Star* and its proprietors at Central Television. Central Television is a Canadian television who is casting part three of the *Chip Dexter* characters — a short film entitled *The Great News* — on the festivals circuit, beginning with Toronto and Turtis. He is based in New York and has been an audience member on *Andy Warhol's* cable TV show (including Warhol's rock video for *The Corp*) and participated in conversations with Warholists for *Entertainment magazine*.

L'Esperance's first *Chip Dexter* movie (on VHS and VHS) was a Super 8 movie of eight minutes. The second *Chip Dexter* movie was made while he was studying classics at Concordia University in Montreal and was 14 minutes long and cost \$200. "That was just a whole series of proses. It was bad cinematography at the Canadian studios. The reason I got the top prize at my university is even like a shivaree. It was 12 little stories of *Chip Dexter*, either points of view, or stories, or people he was interviewing. Some with subtitles and some weren't. And that got me quite a major grant from the Ontario Council for the Arts to develop a script and keep going. They stuck with me because I ran out of money funds. Hardly do they stick with someone that long. They really had faith in it paid off and they're really excited about the film. They're just excited to death."

*Chip Dexter* is more than a character at L'Esperance's disposal. It's more like a complete philosophy and reflects a generally reprobate attitude that is apparent in L'Esperance's work. He was a researcher on radio with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation while at his school and *Chip Dexter* spilled over into his radio work. "That's when the writing of the journalism, documentary, historical facts really interested. By day I was getting interested at to be factual and to be accurate and to use words properly and not be wrong and be absolutely true to the facts. And then at school there was the opposite, things of any precept or concepts you have of what is formal and forget it. So I had decided between the two and it became a very interesting tension. I used *Chip Dexter* in political cartoon

type, type". In this looks like a young, simple, direct, developed, sort of question-answer form. There was absolutely no laugh track, so whoever got it, got it and whoever didn't, didn't."

After film school he moved to New York and started working at the *History* with Andy Warhol. In his third *Chip Dexter* movie *Ringed Berlin*, who appeared in many of Warhol's movies from the sixties, plays *Chip Dexter's* mother. New York performance artist Ann Magnuson, who has appeared in Steven Spielberg's *Empire of the Sun* and *Shining*, *Barbra Streisand* and *Alfred Hitchcock*, and opposite River Phoenix in *Johnny Mnemonic*, plays the psychiatrist that *Chip* visits because he is having terrible, distinguishing health problems.

L'Esperance wanted to "make a film that would capture what a conversation would be like if it was just be photographed. I also wanted to make it *Heavy Metal*, even if it was in a rock way". He shot the film in a sound stage in New York city with "sets modeled after old television episodes of *Lawman*". *The Critical Years* is a collection of unedited interviews presented in an unusual way. Everything is completely unexpected or viewed from an unusual angle. *Chip Dexter* is reviewing segments from his life (he is heard but not seen, and the narration is by L'Esperance) with his analyst. The darkest moments with Wright Berlin, as a deluded mother eating ice-cream in the kitchen of *Chip's* childhood, are the most anxiety-laden. The discussions show young *Chip* as ridiculous and profound and reverent and fragmented pieces of glass. The analysis herself, on the concept of analysis, is described as a churning, diagnosed persistence by Ann Magnuson. It's the sort of movie that is completely personal and complex and contradictory and has a time-release effect, it is memorable in the most insistent sort of way.

"I write all of my films and one of the things that I think is kind of interesting — coming out of a journalism background — when you're writing for news is that line between fact and fiction being blurred. When you've got a character you live with him all the time. *Chip* is always there with me. I'm always talking to him and writing to him through his eyes. It's allowed through him to say things that I would normally find too embarrassing to say. And *Chip* is allowed to talk about his family and things like that, when I wouldn't dare."

"What I learned is it was not people that almost everybody's family has a good story. Everybody has a divorced aunt, everybody's got what they think are relatives but are really a good story. It's also in this way of telling it, this isn't just to tell a story in a traditional way to get it across. I feel like people can tell in the holes a lot."

L'Esperance talks to *Entertainment* that he admires and wants to find out more about, for *Entertainment magazine*. The year he's chosen the cover story about Diana, Kristen and *Entertainment* about *Dawn Lynch*, among others. "The qualities involved with being a good journalist are exactly what you don't want to have when you're doing a creative film. I've always felt that you either do or you report and that's where the danger comes in the film. I have to temper myself at the time and that's hard. And also at every one of these interviews I have to control the subjective temperature at the end of the interview to say 'by the way I happen to have a tape of my work here', you have to modest because there is no point in it, they've already given you so much that the purpose of the interview is an end in itself. In terms of my own writing it helps, it really does help. I hear so much advice along the way, it's a very confusing kind of people but I'm just musing up my own notes and on for good."

*The Critical Years* was first shown at a private screening at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in May this year and later that same night on cable television in New York. As a result of that screening L'Esperance is currently working on a treatment of the part *Chip Dexter* movie as a feature. "It's about *Chip Dexter* and his best friend. His best friend is a kind of special kid who was an every bloke, who used to wear baggy shorts and was too smart for his age and was too smart or too dumb. His regular schools, I remember especially bad friends with that child. This time *Chip Dexter* and his best friend go off on an adventure."

# L'ECUYER



# THIS JAR

In subject matter and approach to filmmaking, Derek Jarman has always been an innovator. ANNE-MAREE HEWITT talks to him about 'footpath movies', money, British cinema and his film about the painter Caravaggio, soon to be released in Australia.



I don't feel anything for filmmaking at all. I started off being a poet and ended up being the obsessus in my own life. I began as a happy-go-lucky bohemian maker with my friends. Briefly, as I moved into what one calls 'youth', I found a world that, although it had a sort of amateurism, was horribly monetrary and hierarchical. I've not really had that with my films. I'd had a sense of it working on *The Draughtsman's Contract* but in a very Caravaggio-painted-in-the-dark direction. You could feel this other world hovering in and around it, the world of Flannery and money. It had taken seven years to get that film made and in the end I thought, 'Is it worth spending seven years on any subject?' I went back to the Super 8 camera because I realized I was not going to sit down and write another script, which we all know is a chore, or why do films ever look like their scripts unless they are boring. Ideation seemed

Caravaggio was meant to be your entry to the mainstream, the beginning of acceptance into commercial British cinema.

There isn't a British mainstream. There's no British cinema, it's a complete myth. British cinema is composed of four or five people of no generation (John at 50, and TV) and four or five of the 'old guard' from a time when 'cinema' did exist. It's a series of framerships that is draped with the illusion of coherence. If there was an industry as such, you would get a coherent path one could follow, with people working from one film to the next. This is not so. Go back 10 or 12 years and it's the generation of Raup and Russell. Then the generation was a very difficult time, the cinema was in the wilderness. Where had it all disappeared to? I don't know. You could name Kit Lennox, whose body of work came out of that decade, and perhaps Julian Temple. It still contains a string of individuals. If you think about it, there isn't even a younger generation. I'm 'Young British Cinema', I'm 40 years old, the same with Sophie Fiennes! We're talking about longer film here. I'm not talking about 'her'. Don't think that I relegate it, I'm

Photographs by Gerald Jarmila from Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio*, published by Thames & Hudson, \$39.95.

# MAN MAN

more interested in underground film, or what might be experimental, whatever you like to call it. I simply call it very low budget cinema because I think it is naturally part and parcel of the movement. I have no idea if off like that.

So what are the famous filmmakers in their opinion? I don't know someone like Alex Cox — he made *Bar And Biscay* 10 years ago, it happened and that seems a very American way of making a movie career. It is an unbelievably horrendous, you may as well be Carnegie and probably 400 pages at 100! It is also the unavoidable thing about French cinema at the moment — hardly anyone is actually reflecting the situation to it. The trouble with my filmmaking was that I was stuck in the system and *Chewiepiggy* was made because I had to stick to that film to make it, so I'd become a feature movie maker. I was, in reality, keen to make films about the issues of now. I said somewhere, "David Mamet regards art film as all that represents itself", and I can understand that you can be writing. I couldn't catch up with the righties as I started to stay with the proper. Now I am rather glad I couldn't, because they were pretty blind and when I did catch up I had a better perspective on Thatcher's Britain, which is a disaster misappropriating as a success.

But your films seem to always have a political edge at the present. Even when dealing with myth or memory, the historical look at *Amélie*, they have the issue of being contemporary. Perhaps this is due to the issues of society they raise.

The thing about social politics is that essentially it can become ridiculous, because it is often a denial that it is one huge question. It can decide things in a way that is impossible, so that all you get is a disconnection there. (Laughs) You know, I become "There. Put it up" and that's it. Don't use the word "gap" and if you do print it, cross it out, because the thing about it is that although it could do a lot about it also makes one a bit glib at many levels. Feminism is another matter, I think that is a much bigger issue involving both the human race and any other that can be seen from the other side.

I was never politically straightforward, it was difficult. My background is too difficult to fit into the patterns of English politics. The basic political idea about my film is that I carried on making them in Super 8. If I had made my political gesture, that's the one. Yes, it was for myself, struggling against the industry situation to find a way around the blockade, yet at the same time I was thinking this should at least give some — what? — something to students of film who have absolutely nothing. They can see someone who is still making films in Super 8 even though I've made those films which have opened in the Berlin Film Festival in competition.

Offer determination to continue to produce low-budget cinema through media other than films

has given Derek Jarman a greater affinity with young filmmakers. Not only is he working in a similar sphere of concern, but he is interested. So the young actors who succeed him in the street with a resume, or those who bring their work to him to see, he receives friendly and enthusiastic. This openness is part of his view of film as a process rather than a product, an attitude which is a motivating force and keeps him in contact with changes in the film culture.

Music video has also kept me in contact. They are adverts really, not specifically about products but also the people mapped inside these adverti-

Even though I'm not very good at making these things (in comparison with the glorious poems you sent me when they have done for me to put me in touch with all the new technology which I could not have had access to otherwise. You never write when you need that sort of something like *The Queen Is Dead*? It is difficult to decide whether it was a promotional video for *The Scream* or a *Jarman* film than had *The Scream* music on it soundtrack. It was much more the latter. The record company backed the video, not *The Scream*. I used I would make my film and asked the band (via the promoters) if I could use their ➤



CARAVAGGIO: The 19th century

music, I never actually met them. So we went away to make those short films as an experiment through video because I wanted to make *The Last Of England* that way. It was rather like taking out a patient as a guinea-pig. We used every sort of technique you could imagine to see what the state of technology was for making Super 8 and video through to VHS. I don't think anything happened in that film that hasn't happened in what you might call traditional underground cinema but it was the case and decisions by which you could achieve that effect that was interesting.

Pop videos have also provided the means to live by. Though I have not done very many, two or three a year, they have been a substantial income. I was able to employ all the people who eventually worked on *Caravaggio* on them, so as a group we were continuously putting together although we weren't making the 'big' films.

There is a striking difference in the associations of the image between the 'big' film *Caravaggio* and your 'smaller' films, say *Arctic Convalescence*. Is this due simply to differing modes of production or mass cultural consumer?

A lot of my work is very much a painter/illustrator 'looking', whereas with *Caravaggio* as style needs to consider that; creating a vision. *Arctic Convalescence* in particular is extreme in its associations of looking, on, about, as in that film nothing really happens but everything is simplified. It contains more a kind of because that's important. There was no idea of narrative there is more shadow, it moves because the people in it move. (Laughing) I call that film a 'No-people' movie rather than a road movie. It was, of course, shot on Super 8, just me, the camera and a few actors, which does restrict your freedom. You can just drift through the narrative, creating your point on anything.

With *Caravaggio* there was a full crew and a tight six week shooting schedule, that does change a lot, as I was trying something different. It's definitely made in a more traditional manner, in the way of a film like *Joan Of Arc*. If

anything, it's closer to the essence of a revision more than an original movie, in as staging, it shows a series of camera movements with those old slides.

Coming from a design/painting background do you feel your films are more interested in staging, art direction and 'the image', drawing meaning from that rather than being strongly narrative?

What you are asking is an odd question really. With *Caravaggio* I was making a narrative through the paintings rather than my actual life. Although his life is quite well recorded it's not very cinematic. Of course some parts are. He was a murderer — as shown from a story — yet most of what we know is how much his pictures cost, how long they had to be, which isn't really going to hold an audience! So this difference lies in the fact that I wanted to reduce the 'image' through the narrative rather than the way of traditional narrative which would be the reverse of that.

In another sense it's simply that I never have had my money to make any films. I fact I spent up the entire amount of money I'd spent on film making... — we shouldn't talk about spending, as money in all that sense? — I spent less than a million pounds on my film *Arctic*, including the prints, *The Last Of England*. To make nearly six feature films makes that harder, knowing that a low-budget film nowadays in this country is two million pounds, more than twice what I've ever spent. I had to work out ways around the constraints this imposed. So the economics played a huge part. It's not possible with a very low budget to have a very strong narrative. I don't want to say that the film would have had to be only a film choice. So I worked closer to home, in areas I knew well, developed from background influences.

(These influences range from a dislocated childhood growing up on a military base, to Slade Art College and his first film jobs designing the sets for Ken Russell's *The Devils*. That informants through his art career is the constant quest for

finding and resources. The creation of the TV film link through Channel 4 in the eighties was meant to alleviate the plight of independent filmmakers, yet finance still remained on the outside.)

Channel Four at their inception had they wanted to make low-budget independent feature films, yet I could give all the filmmakers of the situation who would say 'Why don't they help us?' They failed to support us all. Julian Temple, Bill Douglas (and the year), Ron Fricke, Billy Porte, it goes on and on. I had made the move (was it of anyone in the British cinema that were previously low-budget and gradually independent (Hitchcock), Schlesinger, Astaire and The Tempter) and they didn't support us! They did support those in their own backyard, those in television who knew how to manipulate us. The independent didn't understand a and no-one knew who they were anyway. What was the 'wild west', the open space, where filmmakers roamed quite freely in the seventies, was suddenly fenced off! The idea was that they were going to compete and make it bigger. The irony was, of course, that the 'old-balls' that used to wander through this area were shot out, and I was one of them. They did, in fact, make 'bom' cinema but we were left to fight back with less money.

There is usually a sense of assessment at the work you produce with as little money.

It isn't remarkable, there's no great secret. Any-one can make a film with five pounds and a Super 8 camera, and with a bit more money a can be just as good. Even video. It's just that people are educated to approach things in a certain way. The notion of 'filmmaking' is very separated and structured so that nothing actually you do. You save some money or spent in order that product can be in the right restaurants, directors pull rank on us to be called in. All that has nothing to do with the life of the film, about of work or anything, it's just the big production industry.

My criterion for films is not whether I like them or not but to feel that the people who made them, really needed to make them. You can tell that when you watch a film, whether the people made them or as close to those hours, like *The Tempter* was to my life, that they adapt it. If you can feel that someone wanted it and their friends got together and made it, then that is why it's valid. That's my criterion when looking at the cinema. Otherwise I am not interested. It is absolutely a view from the side of the fence, for them is nothing on the other side, it's a desert.

In the cinema there should be many voices but the system won't allow it and you can't really change that system. If I like *Blowup* and, 'We failed completely, sometimes was going to change the world but we didn't change anything'. But look *My Fair Lady* is an wonderful because it is honest about such things. So long as the 'big' a *big' film* for this small project and that other low-budget film, and it carries on from generation to generation, that is all that matters. You know that sometimes someone breaks through, like *Blowup*, but most don't. I don't make my films for everyone in the world and I'm not a TV supplier who says, 'Sister如今 reached that therefore it must be good' That's not my approach to design. I mean *Van Gogh* is good and *Van Gogh* was first watched by him, then by friends, and then the whole world knows about them. (Laughing) Could this happen to my little film?



Julian Temple, 1980. (Photo: Martin) 100



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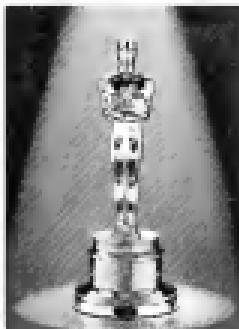
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## HAVE IDÉES



**N**ow that you're winding down teaching, where does that leave you? You were this kind of nomad, travelling around, and then located yourself in one spot, in San Diego for several years, just like the cross on the map that says "You are here". It's almost as though you were reacting to something or against something. So what happens next?

I don't know. I really don't. What can I say, I have the sense that the kind of effort I have been involved in—more or less, in the last 10 years, and prior to that with Jean-Luc Godard, has been a very visible, all-there-ness. If you want, I am someone who has mainly functioned throughout his film career as a film essayist and the things that I do are film essays. It so happens that essays in cinema are the most repressed sub-genre or mode of expression. Why? Essentially because they are absolutely "at home", they're garage films and totally non-commercial. Take *Brigitte et Moi*: more so than *Polo And Cabengo*, it's a film which is absolutely, from its inception, signalled itself by the fact that it's not going to make a penny. That, your dialogue with the production apparatus is immediately marked because composition is something that cannot be ignored. There are very few film essayists you can count them on the fingers of your hand. Jean-Luc Godard functions in part as one. But one shouldn't forget

that Jean-Luc Godard occupies a place in the history of the cinema which is also the place of Leonardo Da Vinci in the history of art. So that whatever Jean-Luc says, including that he casts his persona as extremely embattled and needy, Jean-Luc is someone who has no problem in terms of production. Then you have someone like Clark Gable who, in fact, my wife is closer to in many ways. Clark functions a little bit like me. I suspect — I don't really know because he's a very secretive man.

There are people like Straub and Truffaut who I think should also be considered as film essayists, but their trajectories are exemplary. They might be the most passive of the great film makers in the sense that the type of discourses that they get is more and more reduced.

In a way, the problem is that in the last 20 years the film essay has lost its possibility of substance through television. Essentially, it is a researched format of big television outlets that have enabled the film essay to exist. The problem is that, to take *Round* as an example, here is a film essay which has a strong concentration or acidic emphasis on formal problems, on the formal problems of the craft, generally, the people who can support the type of work that I do are few and far between because the reality of the television outlets is also the reality of a very conservative audience. You have this situation in which

# WILL TRAVEL

When JEAN-PIERRE GORIN arrived in town for the Melbourne Film Festival, there was no match. His passion for investigation, his polemical response to almost any subject put before him, his knowledge of the filmmaking craft, gave audiences here the sense that he had landed from another planet. Indeed it remained this way until the final weekend of the festival when the Wim Wenders pugnacious *Wings Of Desire*, a big film working toward the big ideal; on the other, Gorin's idiosyncratic *Routine Pleasures*, a "film essay" which demonstrates, among other things, Gorin's love of small-scale epics, private obsessions. But the dust didn't have time to settle before the two filmmakers had made their exit, one of them cynically vowed that when he returned the quarks outside the cinema would be for his film.

In Jean-Luc Godard, Gorin once found another match, working with him in the Doga-Verkoy group in 1966-70 (*Pravda, Vent d'est, L'Or In Itali*) then together on *Tout Va Bien* and *Letter To Jane* (1972). It is however a period he is hesitant to discuss: his response to a question concerning Godard at a Festival seminar was, "We have this terribly insane relationship, I mean . . . Phew! Unless you charge me as my analyst, I won't say anything more."

But for his two films screened at the Festival — *Routine Pleasures* (1986) and the earlier *Poto And Cabango* (1979) — he has no final word. For him, the films mark two points in an open-ended system of inquiry, and if you can sneak in a

question about them, it only entices him to further add layer upon layer to their suggestive narratives.

At one level, the films are documentaries: Gorin as narrator observing the lives of others. In *Poto*, it is the life of six-year-old twins Gracie and Ginny Kennedy who were thought to have invented their own language and were consequently bounded by language experts and press alike. In *Routine Pleasures*, the thoughts of painter and film critic Manny Farber are intercut with the activities of a group of model railroad enthusiasts who explain in great detail the workings of their miniature landscapes.

Yet Gorin also knows how to perform, provocatively casting himself as "a drunken bum that grabs you on a bench and is suddenly intent on telling you his life at all costs". He too is a character in these films: fragmented autobiographies which tell the story of a named who left France, travelled in Mexico, Guatemala, the United States, landed a job teaching film at the University of San Diego (with Manny Farber), and then "stayed".

And through the intricate imaginary landscapes constructed in *Poto And Cabango* and *Routine Pleasures*, he has continued to take journeys, mental journeys.

The hobbyists from the Pacific Beach & Western Model Railway Association have a tale of persistence to tell — that is their attraction for Gorin, someone who is always shifting, refusing the direct line. Even in interviews, as we soon discovered, he invokes the detour.

Kathy Bell and Rehearsal Caputo

where there is classical distribution, even if that narrative film is not really a completely Hollywood film but what I call the sub-correctors of Hollywood. Shall I leave or shall I stay? Shall I be American or shall I be French? A whole set of questions that are marked by a big question mark.

Let's move on and talk about *Poto And Cabango*. In a way, it seems *Poto And Cabango* is an answer to *Letter To Jane*. Letter To Jane looks like a film that's really planned out, you have that photo of Jane Fonda, you've selected the still from *Tout Va Bien*, and the voice-overs seem as though they've been already written and they're just read out. But *Poto And Cabango* is completely different, it's like you just come along and you read this article in the newspaper and you thought, "Well, I'm just going to grab my camera, get into the car, and without any kind of planning or anything, I'm going to go and shoot this film."

Well, I've been trained in exactly the opposite way. My philosophy training was "I used to do my homework", and "doing my homework" is really like the approach to *Letter To Jane*. *Letter To Jane* is a film where the homework is done. I decided that I wanted to just improvise exactly the reverse position, except that

as the case of *Poto And Cabengo* — and this is one of the things that explains *Reactive Cinema* and in a very general way when I saw the reaction to *Poto* — *Poto* is a breakthrough and strength.

At that time I was very depressed and I had no work. A friend of mine, Tom Luddy, who was then the director of the Pacific Film Archive in Berkeley, told me that Michael Steiner of ZDF (Deutsches Fernsehen) was passing through town and that if I wanted to do a film I had better find a subject. In the evening I just dropped onto the newspaper where the story of the two men was carried, and there I had a very favourable evening with Steiner and I led to him. I said, "I've got the news, I've secured the rights. I've seen the film. I've got the documents from the children's hospital. I've got the film. Let me do the film." Well, some other believed my lie or he didn't. I don't think it's that important, I think that he really wanted me to do a film and he was ready to give me the possibility to do one. But I really had nothing, so first I called the parents which was really funny because the father answered and you could hear his wife in the background giving him directions and in fact the father was kind of absent, saying things like "a lot of people and a lot of studios have asked us to do a film, etc, etc." So I got a lawyer friend of mine to call his bank and we settled on something. It was also a time when I was coming back into touch in São Paulo.

I went to see the news, and the last thing that stuck me was that they spoke English. They spoke English! The story was gone. So at that point there's two solutions, either you decide, "Well the story is gone and that film is not going to be made" or, on the contrary you say, "Well what's happening interesting is precisely the fact that the story is not there."

I believe that somewhere along the line, as an essential principle of filmmaking is to say, whether it's narrative cinema, fictional or documentary film, there should be something that is like a black hole at the centre of the narrative. There should be something that you cannot talk about or something that you cannot break which is precisely what allows you the drama. In many ways, I have this vision, this idea, that language in general expression in general is only possible if there is the impossibility of expression at its core. We talk because there is something that we cannot say. If we could say it, maybe we wouldn't talk.

So I got this idea that I'm going to do a film about something that has already vanished. It's going to be a film about the loss of innocence, and it's going to be something about infantile language which is one of our oldest myths, I suspect. It goes back to the womb and to the kind of communication within the focus of the fetal wisdom of the mother. And so it's going to be about the loss of the infantile language and the infantile into the world. What really struck me about this situation was that I was dealing with one of our big myths — the myth that all myths are linked to — that is the *magus* world. You know what is the title of Truffaut's film *The 400 Blows*. Basically it's a poem and then it falls into the self-child-category-type of myth. The self-child myth is basically an adult myth. It's the idea that here is the thing that has the strange name of *conscience*, which has to be brought back into the world.

In the case of *Poto*, first and foremost, these kids were imposed upon. They personally wanted to go out, but everybody wanted them to be in the thing that didn't want to go out. Everybody. The therapist wanted them to be in the Nobel Prize material. The parents wanted them to be, for reasons which had to do with their welfare among other things, their path to the economic development of their lives. It wanted them to be in a film. The kids just wanted to go out, and in a way the kids were absolutely fascinated by the fact that everybody saw them as revolutionaries. They didn't see themselves as revolutionaries, and also because they were very pure and naive, they were systematically hurt by the means of investigation they were attracting. People were hating on them for a couple of hours, entering their world which had been very sheltered and very closed up, breaking into it and then splitting. My problem was that I learned and I stayed. So that by coming and staying I found myself completely trapped into a whole set of ethical problems that ultimately film had to explore.

But I was talking about what pissed me off about *Poto And Cabengo*, and it's that people still see it as a "documentary", when in fact it's minimally a short story, a fictional film in which a story was told in much the same way as a short story by Raymond Chandler would be told, with a detective as its centre, narrating, in the case of *Poto*, the filmmaker. Solving a case

which is solved in five seconds flat, but then having to deal with the consequences, the ethical consequences of having solved the case.

There is something else which I think is rather important and I'm going to say implications for the sake of the argument, but it's that I have the sense that cinema is problematically sexual — that is a rather liberal, classical sense — not only in the fact that it depicts acts of desire and of power which have an women, but even more, for some sort of ontological reason, I think that film is sexual. When it's generally at stake in film is the domination, the relationship of power of the filmmaker over his material. Most of the time the director of a film is relatively adopting the *essentiel* position, as though he is saying, "These are — and my material. Look at the way I'm handling it to death. Look at the way I drive out of it a sense of pleasure, and pleasure, you the audience, derive your pleasure from that *essentiel* relationship that goes you into some vicarious contact with my mastery over the material." I have the sense, and once again that is a kind of liberal composition and I'm really simplifying things that are more meta-political than anything else, but I have the sense that it would be interesting to make films in which, as an element of the problematic, what would happen is that the filmmaker, instead of being a dominating force, would suddenly be a dominated force where the material would impose on the filmmaker in a certain way, the filmmaker would have to be drawn or torn around by the material. And I think *Poto* is that.

So what you want to do is challenge that measure of exploitation.

You. But I don't especially intend to challenge it in problematic terms. The only way that I have to challenge it is to find myself drawn into the film and then to end up flushed out of that *essentiel* *essentiel*, power position that is initially given to me by the fact that I am the filmmaker doing the film. It's a rather extraordinary experience in a way, which I might ultimately decide to spare myself.

Let's say the problematic of documentary is really the problematic of respect. You have to show respect to the people and the situation that you describe. In order to show respect you have to give weight, to show respect is neither to put someone on a pedestal or to put someone down — for me there are two sides to the same coin. It is to show the extent or the range of emotions and behaviour that the situation incarnates in you in the relationship to those people. So you're absolutely drawing into the process, you become the marker that enables the audience to locate itself in the process, which means that I do no moral looking like a fool in the films that I make. I think it's absolutely essential in some ways.

In *Poto* the parents are described as *matres* and *patres*, you get the sense that this is a *magus* which is both caring and cold, repressive and supportive, ideal in its dreams and at the same time with a certain type of dignity what is important to me is that idea of giving the range, or giving the weight. In many ways I try to set up emotional dichotomies in my films where ideas and feelings are transformed into each other as rather good friends. I think it's really important to show how much you love your subjects, and at the same time to show how much you're disturbed by it. It's really important to show your struggle to try to relate to it, to find your way through it. But what ultimately brought me a little bit of a little despair was that *Poto* was already a *magus*. It was a caring *magus*. There's nobody in that film that doesn't look incredible, and the look were absolutely fantastic to look at and to be with. But, somewhere along the line, the subject of *Poto* had its own drama. There was a case that was reported in the newspapers, a little item in the daily *gazettes* and it had its own *gazette*, it had its own drama. But because I had been in the cold for quite a while, I wanted to make a film where people would ultimately like me, where they would say, "Awww! That guy who had this reputation as the caring angel of the revolution is a *slightly* *harmless*!" I had no doubts about my humanity, but a lot of people seemed so, and I wanted people to ultimately care for the issues, so to have the sense that I was a decent human being who was trying to do a decent job. And then I got very pissed off with myself because I thought, "Well, this is easy anybody who is not a brute could have done a good film with *Poto*." I did a film which I think has enough originality to stand on its own feet, but after I did it I said, "Well, forget that, next one is going to take people and a subject that is as dry as dry toast. It's going to take people that nobody would give a

second of attention to, whose activities would be left as utterly boring, and I'm going to do something with it. I'm going to take this subject which will have less sex than *Poto And Cabango* and do something which would be more complex, more layered, and more expansive than *Poto*.

#### How did you find the group of model railway enthusiasts for *Routine Pleasures*?

Basically, it's that idea I've long expounded upon, which is that there is no lack of subject matter: you just plant your two feet firmly on the ground, you extend your two arms and you will around are your arms, and that really defines the possibilities of subjects that you can reach. I'm someone who walks, or travels principally around Southern California, but not by driving, a lot of flying.

I knew I had this second film to do initially. I wrote a test, called *G.Y. Joe*, and I knew the film was going to be about me, Americanisation. I didn't know exactly what that film was, so I tried this and I tried that and time was passing by and money was being spent just waiting for the subject to happen. Finally one day I just walked into the Old Art Emporium, which I really liked, the station which has to do with architecture. It has some very nice pseudo Spanish, Mexican, hacienda type architecture, like that kind of architectural beauty that art movements had in the 1930s, and characterises a great deal of the Southern California landscape. I just went there, and there's lots of bizarre activities that happen in the racetrack, even during the off season.

I wanted to do a winter California film. I wanted to do something which had to do with the notion of landscape. I wanted to talk about geography, but I didn't have the money to go travelling, so I had to talk about geography from where I was. And so in this racetrack, during the winter there's lots of activity. In essence, stop, obedience training sessions in the middle of the night and that kind of stuff. Finally I found those guys. The manager I walked in and said: "What? This is it? Here we have is something which may be one of my defects, and it's the need of this sort of encounter with the subject, which is a very practical, pragmatic encounter, where you walk into a space and you sense that you are going to have to explore that space. I like meeting someone or falling in love with someone where, essentially, the object of your love gets already already dashed on the background of something that you encounter at large. I guess an entire kind of film about Southern California."

#### Did you have any fear or was it a sense of adventure?

It was adventure... although the fear was like, "Jesus, you have to hurry up because the film is supposed to be delivered in a month." But more a sense of adventure. I just stumbled onto those guys. There was this hunger and in this hunger there was this box, and in this box there was this landscape that was very small, and there was all these guys that were running this box who looked like they were rejects of a Hawks or Wellesian film. This is a film about men because the other one had been a film about women and my relationship to them. There is something very, very particular in *Poto* in terms of reduction, relationships of reduction which is something important in my life. So there was also the idea of doing something about my relationship to men, which to tell you the truth, I hadn't really thought about because most of my connections or my friends to the world, I thought, were always transposed through women and by women. So there it was, the idea that I was going to do something about men and my relationship to them.

There was this activity which was a bizarre mixture of play and work. There was the malady of an object — the man — which has spanned the United States, but is now out of date. So there was this idea of this big object being reduced yet looking very large in the minds of those guys. There's this idea of doing a film about obsession, which is an extremely tough task to crack because if you ask the obsessed what obsesses them, or what makes them tick, the last they can do is smile at you, as though they are saying, "Please can you not understand why I'm so obsessed" by what I'm obsessed about? So the dialectic becomes very dangerous in that you are suddenly forced to match your own obsession at discovering the obsession of the other. But I'm not someone who's obsessed by taste.

But in a different way you are obsessed with something else. It

we take *Poto And Cabango* and *Routine Pleasures* and the way you place yourself in the film as both character and narrator, which relates to detective fiction, more in a literary sense than filmic, the subject or the activity that goes on tends to stand as a metaphor for yourself. *Poto And Cabango* deals with language and your relationship to that language, being a foreigner who has to deal with a language that isn't your own, and *Routine Pleasures* is somewhat different, it seems to have moved on from there, and it's marked by the line "I'm not quite American but I'm no longer French", and so you're trying to identify yourself in this landscape.

The thing in *Routine* is that, on the one hand, this is a film about landscape, but it's about the American landscape, and in a way *Routine Pleasures* is a direct and polemical answer to things like Paul, Paul's *It's a Big Day*. "Well I'm sorry, I don't have the means, I can't travel, I can't buy Mustang, Keele, I can't buy Sam Shepard." But I don't need to go to Monument Valley. Here I am stuck in Del Mar and I have to deal with this landscape, one that I have all the more difficulty understanding because it doesn't jive so well with the depth of history I am used to with the European landscape.

But then very clearly a track is played which people don't seem to get, and which goes in a way that at a certain point the film fails, but the track is to say: "What characterises the American landscape is not a series of coffee-table book shots. Take a good look at Kodak and a good supermarket and you'll get that kind of spectacular stuff which you could do in Australia, in Malaysia, whatever. *Routine* Suddenly something else happens. This landscape that I'm looking at is the landscape of imagination. What a manual you're seeing those guys but at no point do you see them outside of that moment on a Tuesday night that has been endlessly repeated over 25 years, in which they play their desire, their pleasure, their companion, and in which they play out this mythical position as open space. Mind you, regardless how jaded and travelled I might be, the guys that have the power to move things, and the power to move these little objects in certain ways, the power of their own imagination to locate themselves in the landscape. There is something at stake here, somewhere along the line what characterises the American psyche is this act of minimisation.

Here is a culture that is profoundly nomadic, and I don't think that it is very different from what you get in Australia in the sense of having to face and define yourself in this enormous continent. Here is this tribe of guys who have got these little wooden dolls that they move around, and that is the thing that gives scale in the incredible landscape which has no little historical depth. So there is something there which is not simply "Let's travel, let's see on the road, let's travel from Monument Valley on down to New York City, back and forth and what not." Instead, what is the landscape of the imagination? ... What is that specificity of the American imaginary?

Doing something dissolves itself, that becomes alliance, a break and both between the author French not American. It is the idea of the foreigner because, in some ways, and I suspect there's the same feeling here, everybody in the States is a foreigner. To be a foreigner is the most commonly shared feeling, existential feeling, that Americans have about themselves. They're always coming from somewhere else. When you ask Americans where they come from, generally they'll just give you at a first level another city they originated from, and then what they'll tell you is what place of Europe they come from. So you're not a foreigner, you're an insider. That's the metaphor of the box. You're inside the box, but inside the box there is a situated box. In that box there's another box so the dialectic becomes. How much inside is inside? Where do you get that ultimate specificity, where a fact what you discover is that this origin constantly recedes.

In the process of doing some preparatory work, I had said to myself: "My dear J.P. it's not very interesting, or it's not very smart to constantly re-invent yourself in front of those guys as a Frenchman." Okay, we know it, you are a high accent, they will think you're Maurice Chevalier or Jeanne Chevalier's son. But there is something else, ultimately what the film finally ends is the artistic imaginary. *Routine Pleasures* is a film that puts me in contact with what it's to be a filmmaker or to be an artist, which, at the level where I am, is certainly something which gives everything every minute myth about creation.

Let's take those guys and some of the stuff that interested me. One, a machine that has enabled a trip to maintain its cohesion for 25 years. I'm someone who comes from a time where action

was collective, and that's the same, but all the groups that have known have long and dissolved themselves. Here is a group that has maintained itself. Two, this machine takes 12 months to be repaired. This is not an individual machine, this is a machine which exists only in as much as it enables a collective to stand and give it. Three, this machine concerns 1230,000 worth of equipment 1230,000 of hours which have been put together by people who are lower middle class, or army men, military, retired, working class, unemployed people. They come and they put their individually-owned object of desire in a machine that only functions collectively, and they leave it there. Then don't pick up that trash, they leave them there. So something like the Del' Aire integrated parts that object which includes Chester. Hence it's very nice to come every once in a while to rechristen himself in this little dream in which you play and the distance between childhood and work. That kind of stuff interested me.

What is the nostalgia that you refer to in *Revolting Pleasures*? Does that relate to the nostalgia of those men?

I think it is a confection of everything. It's the nostalgic machine that is on display. There's a certain nostalgia of a country which has a very short historical span about its people, and I would anchor it somewhere in the 1980s. The 1980s is a time where the sense of work and community had an enormous importance. At the same time, I feel that nostalgia is an imaginary reconstruction of the nation, which I suspect is related to (and informed by) the conservative sense of Reagan. Reagan is basically the same age as most of these guys; he is a kind of Hawkingian version of the nostalgic impulse that these guys have. There's an enormous amount of dignity to that conservatism — what I describe in the film are profoundly conservative people, but it's in seeing what this conservatism is really acting out, and it's not only something repressive.

But there is also my own nostalgia for several things: for a certain type of marriage in film, for example, acting for film that explores those own pretenses for justification. Then there's the nostalgia that Farley creates. All that fantasizing at its own rhythm, all that interacting in that moment of space and time, all that trying to define what the times are.

I think one of the things at stake in the film is a feeling very characteristic of the eighties. I find the eighties is about a certain sense of the province, which is wonderful. We're all provincial and we all feel it presented in us much as we feel that there is, or should be, a sense that we cannot really feel because some where along the line we've all been persuaded that the centre has called to us. So we'll feel our provinciality in a kind of frustrated, anguished way. There is no centre — ideological, historical or societal — from which the main bulk of culture, ideas and production seems to come. Individuality is spread all over the place. We didn't know how to make sense of it. We tried to do it in some sort of gigantic, subversive, provincial kind. We're alienated from the world by the representations of this world. In a way the film tries to address that question.

Also characteristic of the eighties is the idea of the privatization of our dimension. Because the state has stepped back and we can only observe its existence, we are in the practicality of our lives go back onto those very small units — family units, friends. Take things like video. It seems to me impossible to think about even one night now without seeing the fact that very clearly people are more alone and more in the privacy of their own homes, on their VCR.

Because it's privacy upon privacy upon privacy. You talk about the private observations of a group of guys of whom you'll know very little about ultimately. Never at any point did I give myself the right to trespass beyond the border they themselves have assigned to their imaginary. At no point is any kind of rapid correspondence done. I take those guys very seriously. I take them at what they want to be and at what they want to do, which is to be the engineers of the Pacific Beach & Western Model Railway Association. I don't go near Corky's kitchen. I don't track Chester, his big daughter, his backsliding wife. I don't go into the dredge of George the 44-year-old unemployed who lives with his mother. I give George the glory of being the engineer of that section.

Then there's the *privacy* of Burton, an ultra-private painter who does these big narrative canvases, where the narrative is just on such a certain path on the canvas which gets interrupted by another path, full of postponed references to checks and



**POTO AND DAHEDO**

counter-checks of his own life, a kind of inventory spread out like a map. The gravity of this guy who is unknown. He was the greatest filmmaker in the States but his work is unknown, and his comments by and large, are not that forthcoming.

Then suddenly the passivity of J.P. Gault, who is like a drunken bum that grins you on a bench and he's suddenly intent on telling you his life at all times. I'm very sensitive to this. One of the charms of film form is to get into contact with people who suddenly start talking in very general and specific terms about a life I completely ignore, and that I really don't care that much to hear. But suddenly that discourse gives me a sense of intimacy or more an idea of intimacy than the idea of intimacy explored and completed. So you've got a film which is private on private, as private, and there is something exhilarating for people in that process. But for me there are more things said, in that film, about the state of things than in a lot of other films than I been seen.

The one of the train enthusiasts, on one side, and Manley Farber, on the other, happens to mind something R.J. Thompson says of Manley Farber, which is that his mode of thought is analog; rather than literary, and, in a very, what you're just said is that if you presented by a literary mode that idea is going to be closed, and it would probably be closed from the very beginning.

That's really the big difference. Most firms function with what you call *closure*. I would be more precise by saying it's an *elusive* system. You progress and there's supports and your elusive system, this or that, and then the thing progresses by closure, by successive closure of possibilities. In my case I have the different terms which I see in Mervin's presentation and writing. It's right and... and... and... and... and... type of thing, which I think has been mostly in the social, been

The one thing that love is about, that desire is about, that has an effect, is primarily the kind of experience we have, where we are.



always deepest something else that gets you off is the object of your desire. And what characterizes the object of your desire is that it doesn't tend to have wings. It doesn't tend to be a person who has an absolutely stunning body, stunning face, running voice, running hair, stunning legs, stunning breasts. It could be somebody older, sharper, and wiser who has nothing simply in the incredible Pardon my dox. You look at a person's face and there's a malice and pain and anguish that it produces. Thus, the propensity for desire is necessarily to generate evil. It's maybe the opposite of the old idea of to make love which is linked to desire and desire. It is the idea of the difference of desire and sex of my desires.

I'm someone who goes back to that theme. It is very intense, very personal, very intimate. It is repressed in society, which I think is the last repressed nation. You can share more or less everything in life right now, and pornography has done a lot for us by essentially focusing on some sort of intimacy, on sheet ends, so far as to where the explosion is supposed to be. The films of the 70s, on the other hand, are still center all the time, in some ways, except of the things I like about them is the idea of voyeurism. It's also a very bizarre period of film where women are portrayed in films as powerful forces, as characters able to hold their own in tough circumstances.

try also a period that has a lot of train lines, if you can still there that.

That's true, but the relationship is one of the things I could not avoid. It's also why I dug the film. I'm not especially possessive about power, but controls and rules are co-substantial. The film does away with one of a leader's primarys a collective station.

These tend to be three prevalent elements or tendencies in your film. One is the references to silent cinema, for instance, the last shot in *Requiem* (Requiem) duplicates the well-known conclusion of the train, and in *Paris, je t'aime* (Paris, we love you) there are many references to silent cinema.

the music works; the second element is the way the films relate to detective fiction, and the third is the fact that the subjects of your films are very localized. It seems these elements form a certain relation that needs to define the fact that you do not want to make distinctions between documentaries and fiction.

I don't believe in the dichotomy between fiction and non-fiction because I do not think anybody is naive enough to believe that what's on the screen is anything else but an image of the real and not the real itself, and that film is a form of, or manipulation of, space on time. It is not the kind of abstraction that arises actively, but behind it is a certain kind of manipulation. The problem is to make the manipulation apparent, so that it can be located, instead of having the audience constantly disoriented over the head by something that pretends to be innocent. That's because to me, The reality is that I don't mind being the manipulated, but what I want is for people to know what my manipulation is and how my manipulation develops over time.

But what a recent control to the two issues is this idea of narration. What is it to tell a story? What is it for the screen to light up the darkness to be felt, and the film to last for a certain amount of time?

There is also something else at stake in these works, and that is that I always conceived them as a certain attempt to rediscover narrative mechanisms for myself. To say to myself, 'Well, it would be kind of interesting to do exactly the same thing in a completely non-documentary context, with actors and characters, the whole thing taken for granted.'

The thing I've mainly been working on for all these years is the idea of layering. How many layers can you put into the subject? Because I really think that the problems we're facing right now is the incredible accumulation of surplus of information and that is the absolute reason. How much do we know at any given moment on any given topic? Once again the differentiation with *Iron Lady* in our recent work is how that surplus is controlled because there is so much accumulation of information, what tells the surplus is the very idea of being able to recognize that surplus into one coherent story. So, something along the line Jean-Luc Godard's idea of the story as the sphere of coherence, which I don't especially remember. For him the over-long digressions the narrative and it puts people in some sort of despair. In this case, the accumulation of information motivates the idea of narrative, but the narrative becomes plural, instead of *ethos* which is basically the narrative model which Jean-Luc has built based on and refused more or less not to have a problem you just do an and and and system that endlessly accumulates the layers. I'm really interested in layering.

Having written on another film, a

## 1.2. *Qualitative and Quantitative Methods*

The film that I'm most interested in right now is *Dark City*, where there are a number of interviews. The first is with the wife of the guy who caused the McDonald's massacre in San Diego, the second is using an actress to portray the mother of Lee Harvey Oswald. It's like we can see progressive stages, for instance, Gunn and Langage (Oscar and Cabaret), Gunn and Langage (Madame Amourous), and with that we're going to be Gunn getting closer to the American psyche, and it's a very dark psyche, but it's through music.

It's the edge of the bystander. It's about two women who travel to the proximity of death, and when ultimately they have to bear the weight of the crime. But I do I think that film will ever see the light of day. There is one film which is called *Real Estate* which is... There's subtleties about the mysterious transformation of the landscape. The film was going to be like a road movie but...

Then, I've written a spy movie which takes place in Ireland and New York, and it's this tiny writing, in a type of Phillip K. Dick's words. Basically it's a "remake" of a film by Sam Fuller called *Pick-Up on South Street*. It's the story of two CIA guys who are obliged to pose as porno filmmakers for a night in Ireland because they're passing the porno tape into Russia with fake information about a replacement nuclear warhead.

For when trying to secure their rights do a story entitled *Style of the New Person* by J. G. Ballard, a writer I professedly admire. It is also suspenseful. I don't know if any of this will meet the logic of you, but I can just swear, well you!



ONLY ANGELS HAVE WINGS! Saving Desires

## WINGS OF DESIRE

*Wings Of Desire*, Wim Wenders' film about Berlin, angels, a trapeze artist and the importance of being Peter Falk, was the high-profile festival film of 1987. It concerns two angels (Bruno Ganz and Otto Stender), unseen by mere mortals but able to hear their innermost thoughts, one of them falls in love with a trapeze artist (Natascha McElhone) and decides to trade in his wings. To the sound of Nick Cave's 'From Her to Eternity', the movie moves from eternity to her, PHILIPPA HAWKISH talked to Wenders about Berlin, the director as painter, endings and dream piles.

Did you intend to go back to Germany to make a film?

Not really. I left New York after Paris, Texas. I had been to the United States for seven years and I left, not in order to make a film in Germany, but because I thought I had finished the scenes I had wanted to do in America.

Did you feel satisfied with that?

Yes. I felt satisfied. I felt that I couldn't have very much more. And also I felt that I wasn't going to go on living there much longer. So I found myself back in Berlin, not really because I had intended to go back, but because my production office was there. I had produced all my films except *Allemann from Berlin* so I went there to do an working on the next movie, which was going to be a film that I have been wanting to make for almost 10 years: a science fiction movie. And it was only being in Berlin, in Germany for the first time since 1977 that I realized I was in the situation of looking at my country and the city of Berlin from a certain distance. And when I was working on the other project I realized that I should do something about coming home. I thought I could postpone the science fiction movie and thought it was how or never to do

something in Berlin, in my own country. Another year or I would no longer be in that peripheral position of someone coming back and seeing things with different eyes. Any longer and I would not feel home again and I wouldn't be able to see it any more.

And when did the notion of the angels come from?

I really can't put my finger on it. Maybe the whole angel idea comes as a way to find a point of view for the film about Germany and as Germany with the angels came this unlimited possibility of looking at things and being a voyeur in they worked in and they have a very objective way of seeing, and in another way, at every moment and somewhere, they can listen to people's thoughts.

Where did the idea that they would want to become human come into it?

That was there from the beginning too. It was almost like the initial idea of the whole thing. I also wanted it to be some sort of love story and mostly, the point of departure for that film was in a way the last thing we shot on Paris, Texas. It was the night when the mother gets reunited with the little boy and Natascha comes up to the room where he is waiting for her

and he walks up to her and takes her in his arms. It was the last thing we shot. And I felt when we were shooting it that through this scene, somehow I had got to a point, emotionally as well as a possibility for myself, where it would open up something new for me, that I could tell another story. I knew that whatever I was going to do next had to start in this point. Now had alternative endings for Paris, Texas though didn't you?

Yes, but that was more in the editing. But the last scene I actually shot with Natascha and Werner, that was the strongest experience at the end, and whatever the ending of the film was, I knew that that would be the character for the next film.

What was it about that scene that you felt had to carry through?

Maybe it was the idea of acceptance. The boy was accepting the woman. At the same time, together with this scene of Werner and Natascha, we shot a scene of Tris (Travis) getting back into his car and driving off and in a way Tris was driving off, representing not only himself but some of the other men in my previous movie. He was walking on air at that moment. He disappeared. And in a way I was left with these other two, and these other two were accepting each other, something came to a stop at his statement when they embraced each other. I can say this now, it wasn't till that moment, but in a way it was logical that I made this film when everything came to a stop. For the first time *Wings Of Desire* takes place in three places, in one city, in fact everything comes to a stop, a man meets a woman and they say to him, 'Stop, stop it, I have to tell you something'. And the wife tells him about her desire to leave, not as a conscience but as a necessity.

You arrive at a very different point at the end of this film from previous years: you end it in the past.

Yes. But I'm not that surprised, because I knew that was inevitable. I took this moment very seriously at the end of *Paris, Texas*. I knew that it would be very different from *Travis* on. With *Travis* a departure, I knew I was onto something else. So maybe it was logical that I came up with a totally different point of view. Everything had to be questionnaire, it is to speak. At the very end of *Paris, Texas*, all of a sudden it was like that everything was possible. Love is possible, you don't have to get away from it. You can come to a stop without

having to fear that it is going to mean the end.

Just to get back to *Wings Of Desire* for a moment — did the angels have to be male?

I seriously thought about the other way round, and having the angels female, but it didn't feel natural. And as it is we have the women as a general characters, very much angels and doing something very dangerous, it just felt much more right. I wanted her to do something dangerous, so that the angel would look at her, would feel moved, like a guardian angel. And I also thought that angels should feel associated to the idea of risk, because it is something that they don't know about. And I liked the idea if the woman was wearing wings. So, I thought she was alive from the beginning and I felt the need for the man to want to become alive, for her to want to want to leave his country and become mortal. I was more familiar with it. And in the beginning there were many angels, some of them were men and some of them were women, and then I reduced it because the whole thing was so veryrey. There were 20 names hidden in there potentially, and I had to eliminate something.

How did your collaboration with Peter Handke work?

It all happened rather fast. From the moment I proposed the preparation of the other movie I was working on to the first day of shooting it was two, two and a half months. I had something on paper in two or three days, just a basic idea and the basic idea was three angels and one of them becoming a man and what that would mean to him. So I called Peter because I knew they would speak not just in everyday language, but in a special way, almost on old fashioned language. I called him and I said, 'This is the only one who could write the dialogue for this, come and work on the script with me'. He had just finished a book, he had, he was exhausted and overwhelmed, and couldn't write a script at all, but then he would come over and perhaps write some of the dialogue for the key scenes. Like the first scene where the angels meet in the car, and they talk about what they have seen that day. And one talk about his desire to end his existence. And that's where we started with a handful of scenes that I really knew about.

We started shooting and it was really nuclear, but I knew the whole thing was only going to work if it was done spontaneously, if it kept the spontaneity and the

quality of a daydream. If we knew more than our angels, so to speak, we would lose it. So we went into the whole thing badly prepared. I knew it was important that the movie be made much more like a poem or a painting, structured like a painting. But it was desperate for the production manager and the production designer, they were ready to kill themselves, they didn't know what they were doing. There was a scene involved in doing it that way, of course. But it's the way other people work if the writer or the painter know exactly what they were doing the next day they would give up. So why shouldn't that be a method for filmmaking? And then again, there were the actors. They were there and that made the whole thing very concrete. They lived the whole story and they turned into angels, and that's not a part you can play during the day and go home in the evening and be yourself. It was quite a challenge for them.

Of course, in filmmaking there are so many other people to consider and you can't really treat them like they are just pawns, so it is difficult. But you can bring up the idea of spontaneity and that was important. And we had something solid from the very beginning, and that was the few scenes Peter had written. In the first two weeks of shooting we had to shoot the credit scenes because they had to take down the tent for insurance reasons they had to fold the tent in mid-filmmaking. So there was some sort of structure there, too.

Was the ending the only one you envisaged, the only one you should

have shot any other? The other angel also became human, carried away by the enthusiasm of his friend ... The scene that we actually shot was a happy work scene, yes, and you can still see the table with cream puffs. Because if you've been an angel for eternity, and all of a sudden you

can touch things, the temptation to take a cream puff and throw it is enormous, I think. It's the first thing an angel would want to do. But in the end I thought it was more important that one of them stayed an angel. It was the learned some in the movie, and we kept it in the cut for a long time, almost to the end. The other ending was more like just powder, it was powdered sugar, the whole movie. Making a plane at night with no instruments.

Do you regard that ending as optimistic?

Yes. Because really everything is possible. You leave with high hopes for the couple.

The glimpses you have into other lives in the film are very different. On the one hand you have this couple, and then you get those sudden glimpses into other lives, you see them for a second, and then they're gone. How does that difference work?

It's like I said before, any of those encounters could become another movie. Anyone could become the hero. The young man who kills himself, the people in the train, anyone of them could become the hero, the movie could just stop there, and you wouldn't see anyone else any more. All these people had such little parts, but everyone was a possible leading character. It was a cinema society so to speak. It was really a strange thing. The motorcycle guy who was dying in the street, we only shot for one day. He came for one day for his thoughts, but it felt like he had been there for the whole movie.

The ending is in some ways a closing off — you are given a certainty about that couple, but you don't have the same sense of certainty about the other people in the film.

But it's there potentially. And those two people, they speak for everybody else.



Zhang Yimou, Yellow Earth director/producer (left) and Chen Gang

## CHEN IS MISSING

**CHEN BAIKE**, the director of *Yellow Earth*, was this year's festival guest that wasn't. The official line handed to the festival organisers at the end of May at a press conference by the *Yellow* the band of the Chinese film *Summer* was that Chen was

"out now," to court. It was passed on to the audience attending the film's first festival screening by Ma Ning, an employee of the state-run China Film Export Import Corporation on leave from his job in its film studios in Melbourne. Ma had been asked by festival organisers to speak on behalf of the absent director. That Chen might be too busy to speak was perfectly conceivable, for he had been working hard on post-production for his third feature as late as mid-May. Unfortunately, it just wasn't that.

Days before the *Yellow*'s cable was cut, Chen told friends how much he was looking forward to his first trip to Australia. He also said that he'd have no trouble taking a five-month off in early June. A week or so earlier, he reported that a straightforward health reason kept him officially informed of the festival invitation by the authorities as far as he knew, neither he, "wings out," the *Yellow* film studio nor the film studio had any objection to his coming.

If they didn't have any objection, however, somebody appears considerably dead. That somebody may well have been Deng Gang, the minister in charge of the Chinese film industry. A man who could never be accused of over-enthusiasm towards the younger generation of film directors that Chen represents. Then again, Deng may have merely been apathetic, or rather creatively interpretive. A policy originally set by the *Yellow*, former secretary general of the Chinese Communist Party.

At the end of May, after *Yellow Earth* had won awards and praise at a number of international fests

Abroad, he banned the film from further participation in the festival's abroad. He reportedly did this after an overseas Chinese suggested the film be allowed to compete for an Oscar — "We will not compare the awards with the bourgeoisie," the Party chief was supposed to have said. Chen, as he explained, in the final analysis, is a master of class consciousness: there was something deeply suspicious about a film which went over so well with an overseas audience of capitalist countries. He and a other officials were particularly concerned with the image of China as presented in the film — poor, backward and aggressive. Never mind that the events portrayed take place more than 20 years before the communists took power. Despite the fact that the *Yellow* was forced to escape in January this year, his policy has never officially been discontinued.

The *Yellow* Earth screened in Melbourne was the one submitted by Chen Yihua for commercial release in Australia. The Chinese leadership hasn't had anything yet in the way of export dollars. The Chinese, therefore, had no say in its participation in the festival. They could, however, avoid even more attention being drawn to it by preventing the director from coming.

Tough luck for Chen, but also for us, as he has a lot to say about his own movies and those of other young filmmakers in China. He can be quite critical of *Yellow Earth*. For example, he even considers the film to be overly sentimental, its main character too softie-like, symbiotic. Chen is also a great signaller, full of illuminating stories about the special problems — human, artistic and bureaucratic — faced by Chinese filmmakers.

Chen grew up, literally, in the film world, for his father is a retired director and their family has a located within the walls of the Beijing Film Studio. Like many other Chinese in their mid-thirties, at the youth Chen was caught up in the radical political upheaval of the Cultural Revolution. His years in the countryside as a "re-educated urban youth" opened his eyes to the shocking poverty and backwardness still apparent in rural China today, and the experience informs *Yellow Earth*.

Chen doesn't like to talk much about his second film, *The Big Parade*, which he was forced to change quite a bit to satisfy the censors. But he is confident that the third, recently finished film will be his best yet. Maybe we will have a chance to see it, and him, at next year's festival!

David Jenkins



BEST ACTORS: Bruce Dern and Peter Fonda

# THE WRITER

The writer has often been the neglected figure in the filmmaking process. In this issue, Cinema Papers looks at the phenomenon of the critic-turned-filmmaker, discusses the tyranny of the script and the debate on turning novels into film. We also talk to writer Gustav Hasford, whose novel has been

## What is the relationship between film criticism and filmmaking? ROSS HARLEY considers the question in relation to the critics-turned-directors of the French New Wave

"The criticism has a valid reason. It's not to voice what goes on in a movie film, but filmmakers are forced out by doing a lot of film criticism." — Eric Rohmer

"Young critics have a way of making films." — Jean-Luc Godard

— *Interview*

"They can't think as to be able to define art by an analysis." — Roland Barthes

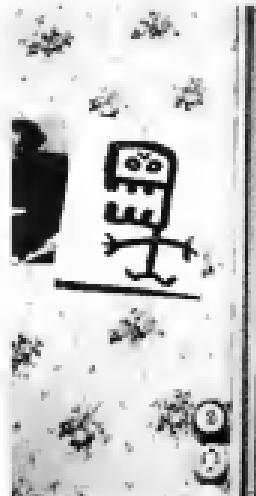
— *Interview*

**W**hy could the role of film criticism possibly be in relation to the scrutiny of film production here, today, in Australia? An obvious question perhaps, but nonetheless perplexing, given the current set of circumstances which prevails over contemporary local film culture. Indeed, who even hears these terms mentioned in anything more than a passing tip comment, a vague wane in the general discourse of these mass arenas, and dare I say telecasts, questions which never quite get answered and yet never really disappear. If film culture, or perhaps more correctly the culture per se, is essentially a living, breathing complex set of interrelationships — between films, audiences, ideas, money, places, myths and material forces — it normally often appears to have no discernible logic. No logic is that of the chaotic exception, and try as certain sectors might, the connection between criticism and filmmaking remains less more often than it is found.

Local critical history is full of attempts to either somehow formulate, make sense of, or else try to re-think the relation between what is written and what is made as film. The writings of Sybille Lewsen, Scott Murray, Vaughan Marmur, Susanna Denyer, Lee Jacka, Adrian Martin, Rolando Caputo

and others have on a number of memorable occasions presented well-considered arguments for, and critiques of, the position of reviewing, criticism and commentary as they relate to our local film culture industries.<sup>1</sup> Although this kind of work is by no means the writing culture one would imagine or even envy, it has provided the ground upon which rests much of what I have to say. My comments and re-consideration of the *Critique du Cinema* and *Noveliste* newspaper are not presented outside the context of the present local film scene, but as a space only upon it. My fundamental argument is that the making of criticism and the reading of films need not necessarily be considered as mutually exclusive, and moreover, that the kind of interaction is not without historical precedent. That the Cahiers group developed a particular way of coming to terms with the relation between thinking and doing comes as sort of obvious reason enough for us to take it as an exemplary model either. The last film scene has had more than its fair share of cult-like models which failed as soon as they were adopted, as if all film culture required was a new model instead of a complete overhaul — which is what it really needs.

The last thing that I would want to see is the forced imposition of yet another model which is incapable of thinking and working in its own environment. What I am suggesting is that to dwell upon a particularly interesting example of



PIRETTA: David Craven

# TESTUFF

filmed by Stanley Kubrick, learn about the trials and tribulations of TV scriptwriting, and hear from novelist Angela Carter, who has written screenplays for two of her books. In the next issue, we will hear from some of Australia's leading screen writers and continue the debate on literary adaptation.

how critical reflections on the cinema gave rise to a new and enlightened interest cinema cannot be devoid of relevance to our current critical condition. Perhaps we could even adapt Chekhov's famous maxim, "We in politics by other means", and consider the possibility in these Gedächtnis that "Filmmaking is conducted by other means".

There is nothing particularly new about critics or theorists turning into filmmakers, or conversely, of filmmakers producing critical texts. In Russia, at the turn of the century, Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Vertov were each encouraged in different ways to reflect theoretically on their own cinematic practice as well as the broader problems of contemporary art and film scene. During the 1950s and 1960s Lindsay Anderson and Karel Reisz wrote on American cinema and film practice in the British journal *Sightline*, while in America, people like Peter Bogdanovich, Paul Schrader, James M. Cain, and Sam Peckinpah wrote various film criticism either before or during their own filmmaking careers. The study of filmmakers who write and writers who make films is worth a couple of books in itself, but I mention them here in passing to convey the sense that criticism and film practice have at least occasionally existed side by side.

However, it is the group of critics who wrote for the French journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* from its inception in April 1951 who gave our attention

here, if not for the theoretical rigour of their writing then for the unflinching accuracy and passion with which they argued their polemics. And of course it is this grouping of Cahiers writers — Jacques Rivette, Claude Chabrol, François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Eric Rohmer, Luc Mastroianni and Pernell Roberts — who provided the major impetus behind the much vaunted auteurist rage of the early 1960s. To the critics writing at Cahiers in the 1950s, the French cinema was culturally, politically and aesthetically impoverished. The notable exceptions were masters directors like Bresson, Cocteau, Chirac, Clouzot, Becker, Astur or Lautranchard (both the last two aeronauts) writing for Cahiers who were able to make interesting films against the tide of French cinema, which according to Jacques Rivette was "unwillingly another version of British cinema". A mediocre film of even there was one, but not so very different from our own situation. Caught in a context where genres have no immediate connection to cultural softness poems, or say the prague or the western films did in America, a national cinema would have to invent some other way of putting a lift in its own. The task that Cahiers set for itself was nothing short of this, though its battles weren't to be waged on nationalistic or monocultural style terms as one might have expected. If a new arrangement of the pieces which go together to make up the cinema was to be realized, it had to be on the grounds that cinema itself demanded. The new could only be constructed out of the ruins of the old. According to Rohmer: "For the cinema to have a future, its past could not be allowed to die".<sup>11</sup>

And aware of the history of the cinema they certainly were. The Comité national français provided a venue for the films of the past to make their entry into the present. To know the cinema is to watch it, listen to it, pull it apart, draw on it, talk about it, review it, place one film in relation to another. Although an obsessive cinephile-cum-filmmaker like Jean-Pierre Melville would claim that you wouldn't understand the full significance of Griffith, Hawks, Lubitsch, Ford or Kurosawa unless you saw their films when they were originally released — as of course he had — the Cahiers critics tenaciously learnt and absorbed the film lessons into their writing and memory. Their spare, watchful movies was considered as an inheritance in a *Rousseau* film-making, whereby the mechanisms of the cinema would be



John Peter Melville



JEAN-LUC GODARD: One hundred plus one

He became so deeply engrossed upon these investigations that it would dictate where, potentially, how a scene should be shot, where a light should be placed, or how a line should be used. The camera was there to be monitored and to be elaborated upon, but it was also to be part of what Godard refers to as an emboldened "revolution that might be effected in the methods of making pictures by this new means of its humanity."<sup>11</sup> The essays that Robert and Godard wrote on Hitchcock (later developed into a book on his first 40 films), Rivette's reviews of Lang and Pravda, Lux Mundi on Fuller or Godard, Truffaut and Godard writing on Nicholas Ray, or Truffaut, Robert and Rivette on the virtues of Cinecamera — all share as part of the art of *constructing film*, in it the one in question or some other imagined film yet to be made. Curiously, or perhaps not surprisingly, this art of *constructing*, thus gaining regular of occasions a status identical to the idea of *mise-en-scene* (literally, the staging or presentation of a scene) as advanced by *Cahiers* over a period of ten or so years. Without wanting to simplify the debates around the meaning and significance of *mise-en-scene* as a critical concept,<sup>12</sup> we can see that there is a certain equivalence between the usage of *Cahiers'* critical arguments and the conception of their films. As Jonathan Rosenbaum has it, "if the entire body of Rivette's work can be read as a series of evolving reflections on the cinema, the (perverse) critical work ... is inextricably linked with the critical work represented by his filmmaking."<sup>13</sup>

Godard's interests are similarly angled towards the ideal of criticism by other means: "Preferring close-observing and the Cinematheque was already a way of thinking cinema and thinking about cinema. Writing was already a way of making films, for the difference between writing and directing is quantitative not qualitative ... Today I still think of myself as a critic and in a sense I make more than ever before. Instead of writing criticism, I make a film."<sup>14</sup>

The debt to André Bazin, the "father" of *Cahiers* de Cinema, and more importantly here, the semi-autobiographical *Antoine et Co*, are perhaps obvious. The poignancy of the underlying term "*cinéma-vérité*" cannot be underestimated, for it was the concept that most caught hold of the nascent *new左翼* imagination. As a way of re-thinking the relation

between writing and the cinema, it was particularly useful in providing an alternative to *statural* and *historical* terms which predominated much film criticism of the day. Agustí's seminal essay "The Birth of the Avant-Garde in cinema-vérité", appeared in 1958 in the *Cinéma* sponsored journal *Revista Pionera*, announcing that this was "the new age of cinema, the age of the camera-style (camera-vérité). This metaphor has a very precise sense. By it I mean that the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the urge for its own sake, from the immediate and concrete demands of the narrative, to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language."<sup>15</sup> The act of breaking free from the demands of narrative was, however, only possible via a loosening of the language of cinema. Its impetus came via the combined processes of looking upon visual groupings of film, analysing and annotating them, and then reworking them by means of the camera itself. For this reason, none of the *Cahiers'* critical stances or devices were written in stone as it were. Their published recognition of the American cinema in the fifties turned attention towards a large number of neglected films and filmmakers at the same time as that work gave rise to a number of key critical concepts.

It's not my intention to give an adequate account here of the use and significance of these crucial terms — *mise-en-scene* and *politique des œuvres* — for which I would recommend Jean Mitry's excellent introduction to the *Cahiers de Cinema* The 1950s collection. These terms were fully concentrated within *Cahiers* at the best of times. For the purposes of this article we can take *mise-en-scene* to be the way in which a scene is put together — in composition, the camera movement and placement, the transition from shot to shot etc. As a form of criticism, *mise-en-scene* was never really a theory so much as it was a working method by which films were analysed and made. So too is *politique des œuvres* (roughly, *newer policy*) was never actually a theory, though so-called *new critics* was basically concerned with evaluating the work of particular directors whose individuality could be discerned across separate films and indeed whole careers.

At this level, the two terms are inextricably linked. It is with the *mise-en-scene* that the *new critics* transform the material which has been given to them, as it is in the *mise-en-scene* that the *newer critics* turn individuality into the film.<sup>16</sup>

But *newer critics* did not necessarily guarantee that each successive film would necessarily receive critical accolades. This is particularly true of *Cahiers'* attitude to much of the American cinema in the sixties. Whereas in the fifties people like Anthony Mann, Robert Aldrich, Otto Preminger and especially Nicholas Ray had been almost beyond rebuke, in the sixties they were responsible for megahits, and hence not as valuable to the *Cahiers* project. Jerry Lewis, John Cassavetes and Arthur Penn were virtually all that was left of the American cinema, at least if *Cahiers* best film here was anything to go on. Pierre Koenig's warning — "better good payroll cinema than bad directors classics" — may seem strange in the light of *Cahiers'* all-outred enthusiasm for auteurs, but it actually represents the degree of healthy pragmatism which permeated their approach as theoretical construct.

The reason why *Cahiers* critics liked the American cinema in the fifties had to do with these films' technical virtuosity and non-European stylism. By the early sixties *Cahiers* was

complaining that American cinema was becoming too 'Europeanised' Godard insisted that of the several American film releases, "nowadays 80 per cent are bad", it seemed about the same time that Andrei Tarkovsky would have been starting to 'translate' the auteur theory to the American cinema in an totally — or what at the time seemed like in totally! 1

By this time Rivette, Rohmer, Truffaut, Godard and Chabrol had all made their first films. In many ways the connections between their interests and their filmmaking practice were, as mentioned earlier, fairly proximate: Godard's *A Bout De Souffle* was like a modernist version of Hitchcock's gangster film, Rohmer's *Le Signe Du Lion* fits less easily into a previous critical schema, but can be seen as his homage to Italian neorealism; *Peau Neuve* Apparatus is Rivette's linguistic adventure where "no one can hope to explain the world, or exhaust by itself all the possibilities of the real" 2; Chabrol's *Le Bon Seigneur* is distractingly Hitchcockian in tone, point of view and effect, and *Le Joli Gang*, according to Godard's *Cahiers* review in 1959, involved not about all the qualities of the film on Truffaut's list but for 1958! It would be quite a task to determine the degree to which these tendencies were pursued or abandoned throughout their subsequent careers. Through such a task would, I suspect, reveal the degree to which the groupings of critics subsumed to certain critical and theoretical formations for as long as they could be tried out, proven, or else cast aside in their own interests. In marked difference to the academic theoreticians often associated with many contemporary efforts to couple theory and practice together, the Cahiers group maintained a playful adventurous approach to rethinking the limits of cinema's possibilities.

In the light of this endeavour to conclude with the instance of the ongoing discussions on film language throughout the sixties Rohmer's approach faced the question in terms of synthesis, meaning that the idea of a cinematic language required the filmmaker "take up a position via a via causa which is neither that of the viewer nor that of the spectator" 3 whereas Godard tended to avoid the angles of language and philosophy of language and has own cinematic work from the early sixties onwards. But it is Rivette's discussion with Roland Barthes in 1963 which best exemplifies Godard's response to the advances of film theory. The



JEAN-LUC GODARD. *After Rivette in Studio A Paris*

relations between technical and critical or theoretical knowledge of the cinema is after all a linchpin in Godard's proposed problematic, and the Cahiers group was in fact one of the first coherent groupings to begin discussing the role of aesthetic and linguistic theories in the study of the cinema. Remember, this is only a year before Metz wrote the first chapter of *Film Language*. How easy it might have been to open up that newly emerging discipline and make of it the new all-encompassing critical explanation, as might have been the case at another time and place.

But Rivette's engagement with Barthes is an enthusiastic one as it is deserved as an praise of such a project, always aware of potential pitfalls, reifications and shortcomings. He could agree that "every critic's drawn to be able to define an art by its techniques" 4, but at the same time felt compelled to voice his apprehensions: "The idea of the cinema as a language may never perhaps be fully workable, but we have to pursue it all the same, if we are not to fall into the trap of simply regarding the cinema as a manipulative object — as an object of pleasure and discussion which cannot be explained. The fact is that the cinema always has a language, no other an element of language always comes into play" 5.

The idea may not be fully workable, but "we have to pursue it all the same". Perhaps it's not such a bad way of looking at things after all.

## NOTES

1. See for example, Brian Lavers, "Not for the Likes of us", in *A Cinema & T. D. Kraven (eds), an alternative Film Studies, Stuart Murray, original Cinema Pages material reprinted in *Cinema Pages* 94-95, March 1993; Margalit Frenkel, "On Discrepancy: A Review of *Screenwriting*", *Screenings* June 1993; Ian Jenkins & Roberta Dowdall, "The Structure of Discourse" Vol 1 1993; Andrew Martin & Roberto Capella, "Book of Film Criticism", *Screenings* Jan/Feb 1993.*

2. The synthesis of these two has a certain affinity with what is often placed into a longer line of cross-contamination which would add the following to those already mentioned. In no particular order: Serge Silberman, Michel Soavi, Robert Bresson, Paul Mayrberg, Fred Wilkins, Louis Malle, André Tautou, Michel Rabaté, Christian and André Gorz, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Alain Tanner, Alexandre Astruc, Roger Dornford, Alexander Kluge, Chantal Akerman, Maya Deren, Jean-Louis Comolli, Raymond Béhar, Kenneth Anger, René Bousquet, François Truffaut, Robert Bresson, Raymond Tavel and André Tarkovsky — for names.



MELVILLE. The director in his set. Photo Horstens-Dana Münchow

- Quoted in Tom Milne and *Cinéma du Cinema*, 1989, Harvard University Press, USA, 1990, p21.
- Malick would have "I think I am the last living witness in France who you really on behalf of you was. American cinema". The film which was released in April 1995 is such as all the many others when power and influence are exercised in the Cinéma du Cinema, in *Les Mémoires, Malick, Léonard, Becker & Wenders*, 1997, p3.
- See *Les Géants, French Influence in the Cinéma du Cinema* and the section of the *Lower Cinema Correspondent* in January 1995. *Thèmes et Histoire Littéraire*, 19, *Cinéma du Cinema*, Becker & Wenders, London, 1993, p20.
- For a more detailed account of the question of style in the cinema of cinema, see *Les Mémoires, Malick, Léonard, Becker & Wenders*, 1997, p2.
- See also *Revolutions with Rivers: Text and Cinema*, BFI, London, 1977, p1.
- See *Les Géants, "Théâtre with Jean-Luc Godard" in Cinéma du Cinema*, 1997, p21.
- Alphonse Allaud, "The Birth of a New French Cinema: la cinéma stylé", in Peter Cowden, *The New French Cinema*, 1988.*
- For "author policy" becomes "author theory" in the subtext of much debate. In general, however, we can say that cinema apprentices in Germany avoid the political function of being able to make certain sorts of films from others. The distinguishing characteristic of apprentices in their period is that their training is always oriented on the degree to which an individual can tell their personality or world view through the other might by other means express in a modified form of their film. For most detailed discussion of how it might do so has been made in our recent vocabulary, see Robert "Hyperbole", *Cinéma du Cinema*, The BFI, Andrew Taylor, Director of Film, *London & Worldwide*, London, 1994, pp128-31, and Andrew Sarris, *The American Cinema*, Dalton & Co., New York, 1968.
- John Cragg, *Thematics of Authorship*, BFI, London, 1981.
- Despite the numerous programmes of *Screen*'s films, it will not only dominate the rest of Hollywood film history, Todd McCarthy and Charles Flynn told *King of the Hill* represents one end of the spectrum of writing as at least the surprising that Screen had had, tellingly, while *Terrence and Cormac* is volume *Dictionary of American Film Directors* remains the critical analysis of many figures only briefly dealt with by Screen.
- James R. Ebert, "With New Approach", in *Screen*, Texts and Interventions, op. cit., p21.
- For "Author", "The Old and the New", in *Cinéma du Cinema*, 1997, p10.
- Robert Ristow, "Terrence & Cormac's Cinema: Rethink on an interview with Michael Lehmann and Jacques Ristow", in *Cinéma du Cinema*, 1995, 2027.
- ibid, pp333-40.



TRUFFAUT: Fancy footwork on the set of *Contempt*.

## THE WRITE STUFF

"We need better scripts," has become a catchcry in talking about Australian cinema. SAM RONHIE argues that so-called 'better scripts' are often the recipe for worse movies.

In the 1950s in Italy there was a kind of guerrilla war carried on by some film directors, among them Antonioni, Fellini, against the consequences of *la scena* (the strong script). It was fought in order to gain control of their film from producers (the script was an instrument for governing the film) and to make the cinema from the tyranny of the script, of the narrative rules it imposed, and the experimentation and innovation the script seemed to present.

What I would loosely like to call the modern cinema, and which I will give some examples of in a moment, has reduced the central place of the script as the key element in the determination of the structure of the film, of its look, its movement, its message. From solid outlines, often with "dramatic" values, the script has become more and more a sketch, bare mention and in instances has completely disappeared. The script belongs to a highly bureaucratized "dramatic", neoclassic cinema which is by now old and tired. By contrast, in Australia, there has been for some time a call for better scripts, better screenwriters, better dramatic writing, as if in breaking right down everything that is new and interesting toward all that is conformist and mediocre.

A number of films particularly impressed me at the last Melbourne Film Festival: *The Seafarer* (directed by Anglo-Australian, Andrew Phairer (Klorin), *La Région Per Requin* and *Aboriginal* (Roxon). In none of these films does the script have any particular status.

In *The Seafarer*, which is a long film, script elements are few: the dialogue is spare, dramatic events are minimal, the plot is thin, the movement of events is indirect, camouflaged and unnoted. Much of the pleasure of the film is visual: settings, light, gestures of characters, postures of the actors. The camera suddenly interests itself in things independent of other narrative or character, things at the boundaries of the fiction itself: the light in a window, the shape of a coastline, a landscape framed by power lines, the diagonal of a stream reflecting scale and density in the shot, the simple series of spaces between characters appear in them and a "drama" begins, or after characters have left them and there is no longer any drama "to take place". What is viewed is narratively empty: what, a fit in the aerial distance of that regard. There are shots which seem purely instrumental, dependent on necessary things, a passing road, a glimpse of something, a reflection of light, a complaint or description of the weather, none of which could have been planned in advance and which the filming could then reproduce. *The Seafarer* frequently moves away from its narrative, breaks



POST SCRIPT: *Le Japon Perdu*, Du Japon au Japon

the subject of the fiction there is the subject of its filming which has a life of its own, its own discourses and narrations. *The Backpacker* has no narrative core so broad and dense every other activity and level of the film and its hard and flat script is broad that narrative.

The other films I mentioned are similar in this way, in their spontaneity, fragmentation, in their structuring a relation towards the narrative rather than simply expressing it, in the fact that they are forced in the process of their making, not beforehand, not made according to plan.

The 'drama' of *Rosine Plessner* depends on the relations between the filming of it, which negotiates the very person of the filmmaker, and the apparent subject which is fixed, the model redecorers. These relations, of necessity, are created while the film is taking place and largely dictate the film's direction and scope. What becomes fascinating is the shifting line between the subject and its spontaneity, between a documentary and its fictionalization and the varying areas of these by the trajectory of a history and the subjectivity of the search for it. These relations change, become radicalized, unpredictable, they are neither fixed, nor clearly narratable. The film is made of the complex of elements: the model redecorers, Gare's moving through these manicured landscapes, the unaccomplished landscape paintings of Macony Parker, Gare's search to find himself in the landscape of America. But as these elements move toward and against each other new ways form, new complications occur as the direct result of this history of relating, of filming, of editing, of creating. The sense of *Rosine Plessner* comes in the very process of the film and there is nothing before that, it gets worked out as it moves along.

The story of *Le Japon Perdu* concerns a young woman who is in search of something which she will only know when she finds it; that thing is both material and spiritual, an object and a vision, the eternity of a moment. The film has a plan, but the plan is only a sketch (in fact looking for something). Within the plan almost everything is improvised — the narrative-bound single leaves nothing over, nothing left to discover. The film exists between its plan and the improvisation of its details which force one to change direction, while the plan remains as a grid, moments and instances disrupt it, re-creating for of the film a relation to the improvisations of the narrative, the horizon is sensitive to the vagaries of whatever may happen to her, from which she sees and forms a plan and to which she reacts ... and in which the film reacts. There are the pressures of a world (the word, the script) and the dissolving pressures of desire

(in particular, the unpredictable, the un-pred-duced). In this philosophical tale of great elegance and intelligence there is another rule, or one that I am imposing on it, a discourse on narrative, on the plan, of everything working together according to plan.

Finally, *Horizonte* contains three essential elements: the Brecht novel *Wahring Heppen* as its power, the theatricalness and mise-en-scene of the action of the novel to exclude the decor, the settings, costumes, the looks and gestures of the characters, who are double characters (of the novel, of the theatre of the novel) though that doubling *goes for* everything; and the third element, which is the film of the dramatization. So there are three of everything: the novel, the theatre, the film of the theatre. Nothing at all is written in *Horizonte*, nothing says it in plain. While each element is worked separately, they wonder between different musical dances, different narrative substances. It is not simply that such things, such elements, such characters, every line and every gesture is potentially treated, but rather they never go further than this, into an over state, a plurality of worlds and times.

*Horizonte* manages this play of ambiguity and ambiguity, of difference and its dissolution very well indeed, as with the *Le*



Antonello

4 other films I mentioned, what happens only happens in practice, in formation, in 'the act'. In most conventional narratives, scenes are consequential and organised in advance; in these films consequences are more varied, more explosive and they can only be known after. In these films everything moves, in the others nothing moves, all is fixed, set, ordered.

Antonioni called films of this kind (like his own) the 'vices' of the cinema compared to the 'virtues' of popular commercial production which prioritised the existence of 'vices', both materially, than the practice of 'virtues', and less materially, as the very reason for there to be a cinema at all. Antonioni was fond of remarking that virtue on its own would be unbearable. What troubles me about the Australian film industry is that it is so virtuous, and, so terribly afraid of vice, with the result, as Antonioni predicted would happen in such cases, that it has become intolerable. The very last thing that needs is more virtue in the shape of better scripts. Besides, I believe that there is probably no such thing as 'better script' since the best script would be one that would not exist (the absence of vice) whereas to seek to write the better script is to seek conformity, which could not, by that very fact, be much good at all.

The evolution of the Australian film industry, at least since the mid-1970s (about the time of *Power At Hanging Rock*), has had to make a place for itself within an international commercial framework whose rules and values have been derived from the model of the American cinema (and to a part dictated by that cinema). Largely for this reason there has been a demand for better scripts.

In the film-industrial situation there is an established order for the realisation of a film: from idea, to treatment, to scriptwriting, to casting, to filming. The order implies a specific division of labour, of experts, of copies, of narrative values for which the script functions as the essential plan for that order. It forms the basis for the calculations of cost, of outcome, of equipment, of personnel and it contains the procedures for following out its order, of turning words into images, a story into pictures, and pictures restructured and linked into a story. It defines the very function of things in the film.

In a relatively new and inexperienced film industry such as the Australian industry, aware of its talents but, close about its ambitions, calculations have to be that much fiercer, complete that much more precisely, at greater risk usually due to a high degree of conservatism. The script is not only the key element as a dramatic spectacle, but the evidence or evidence for the finished film (the basis on which finance is often sought). We control the script to these calculations of control, the film. And the line of control, a control exercised by producers, financiers and funding bodies, is almost always toward the known, the predictable, the safe.

I don't wish to make a contrary call to the call for better scripts, nor to base 'virtues' with 'vice', to hold up a European experimental narrative tradition against what is being made and considered in Australia, but I do want to suggest a difference, not a complete difference (all 'vice' would be equally intolerable), but the fact of difference, the support, alongside and within a conventional-narrative-dramatic-spectacle cinema, tightly controlled, organised, scripted, fixed, another cinema which, as in the old days, actually moves. Besides, and once again to refer to Antonioni, only such a cinema provides the reason for there to be a cinema at all.

## THE WRITE STUFF

You've read the book, now see the film: from Tolstoy to Nora Ephron, Mary Shelley to Marcel Proust, novelists have been raided for film scripts. But what does the transition from page to screen involve? In the first of a two-part series, BRIAN McFARLANE looks at the discourse on adaptation.

**E**veryone who sees films based on novels feels able to comment, at levels ranging from the giddy to the erudite, on the nature and success of the adaptation involved. That is, the interest in adaptation, unlike many other matters to do with film (eg, the deployment of the camera), poses no questions of authorship, is not a refined issue. And it brings backwords and forwards from those who talk of novels as being "destroyed" by screen filmmakers to those who regard the practice of adapting the film and the novel as a waste of time.

As to the filmmakers themselves, they have been drawing in literary sources, and especially novels of varying degrees of cultural prestige, since film first established itself as predominantly a narrative medium. In view of this fact, and given that there has been a long-running discourse on the nature of the connections between film and literature, it is surprising how little systematic, sustained attention has been given to the process of adaptation. This is the more surprising since the issue of adaptation has attracted much attention for more than 60 years in a way that few other



GRAPHTH: Michael Mann and Henry G. Sanders in talk of a script

film-related issues have. By that I mean that writers across a wide critical spectrum have found the subject fascinating: newspaper and journal reviews almost universally offer comparisons between a film and its literary precursor, from the magazines to more or less scholarly books, one finds reflections on the incidence of adaptation, works across and cross, complex and simple, early and recent, address themselves to various aspects of this phenomenon almost as often as the intricacies of the cinema.

In considering the area here, I want to begin by drawing attention to some of the more commonly recurring discussions of the connections between the film and the novel.

#### Conrad, Griffith, and "Seeing"

Commentators in the field are fond of quoting Joseph Conrad's famous statement of his aesthetic intention: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel — it is, before all, to make you see!"<sup>10</sup> This remark of 1897 is often cited, consciously or otherwise, 16 years later by D. W. Griffith whose cinematic intentions it recorded in his *Autobiography* (1948): "The task I am trying to achieve is above all to make you see!"<sup>11</sup> George Steiner's all-but-plagiarising work in the film-literature field, *Nearness And Film*, draws attention to the similarity of the rhetoric in the start of his study of "The Two Ways of Seeing", claiming that "... between the concept of the visual image and the concept of the verbal image lies the real difference between the two media".<sup>12</sup> In this way he acknowledges the connecting link of "seeing" in his use of the word "image" and, at the same time, points to the fundamental difference between the way images are produced in the two media and how they are received. Finally, though, he claims that "conceptual images evoked by verbal stimuli can scarcely be distinguished in the end from those evoked by non-verbal stimuli";<sup>13</sup> and, in this respect, he shares common ground with several other writers concerned to establish links between the two media.

By this, I mean those commentators which address themselves to crucial changes in the (mainly English) novel towards the end of the 19th century changes which led to a stress on showing rather than on telling and which, as a result, reduced the element of authorial intervention in its more overt manifestations. Two of the most impressive of such accounts, both of them concerned with ongoing processes of transmission among the arts, notably between literature and film, are Alan Spiegel's *Person And The Cinema Eye* and Kathy Cohen's *Person And Person: The Dynamics Of Reception*. Both of them offer a rigorous, questioning approach to ways in which the novel appears to have been influenced by the film. Spiegel's avowed purpose is to investigate "the common body of thought and feeling that unites film from with the reading novel";<sup>14</sup> taking as his starting point Flaubert when he sees in the first great 19th century example of "conceptual form", a farm depended on supplying a great deal of visual information. His line of enquiry leads him to James Joyce who, like Flaubert, respects "the integrity of the seen object and ... gives it palpable presence apart from the presence of the observer".<sup>15</sup> That line is pursued by the way of Henry James who stresses "a balanced distribution of emphasis in the rendering of what is looked at, who is looking, and what the looker sees";<sup>16</sup> and by way of the Conrad-Griffith comparison.



CONRAD COPPOLA: Marlon Brando as Don Corleone in *The Godfather*

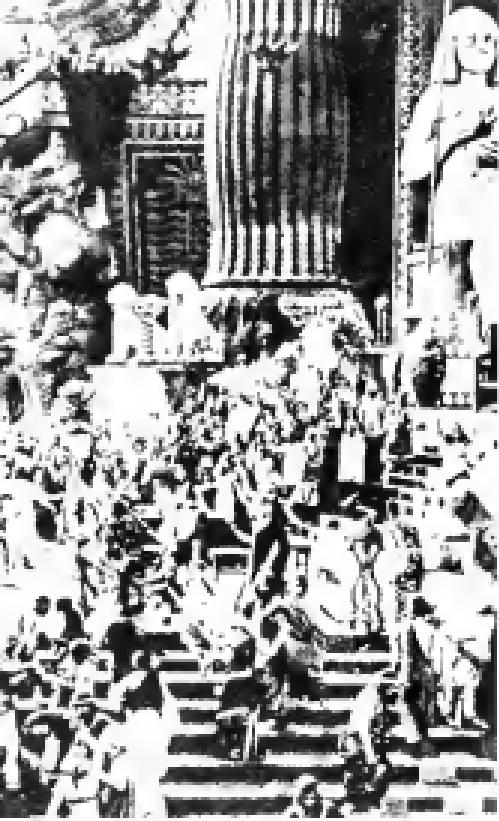
Spiegel pushes this comparison harder than Steiner, stressing that though both may have aimed at the same point — a comparison of image and concept — they did so from opposite directions. Whereas Griffith used his images to tell a story, we return to Steiner: Conrad, Spiegel claims, wanted the reader to "see" an end through and finally past his language and his narrative concept is the hard, clear bedrock of images".<sup>17</sup>

One effect of the focus on the physical surfaces and textures of objects and figures is to de-emphasize the author's personal narrative voice so that we have to read the sensually unmediated visual language of the late 19th century novel in a way that anticipates the viewer's experience of film which necessarily presents these physical surfaces. Conrad and James further anticipate the cinema in their capacity for "deconceptualizing" a scene, for changing a point of view so as to focus more sharply on various aspects of an object, for exploring a visual field by fragmenting it rather than by presenting it monolithically (i.e., as it was seen from a single perspective).

Cohen, concerned with the "process of convergence" between art forms, also sees Conrad and James as significant in a comparison of novel and film. These authors he sees as beginning with the representative novels of the earlier 19th century and adding at a later stage an "emphasis on 'showing how the events unfold dramatically rather than presenting them'".<sup>18</sup> The analogy with film's narrative procedures will be clear and there seems no doubt that film, in turn, has been highly influential on the modern novel. Cohen uses passages from *Portrait of an Artist* and *Virginia Woolf* to suggest how the modern novel, influenced by techniques of Renaissance painting cinema, drawn attention to an encoding processes in ways that the Victorian novel tends not to.

#### Dickens, Griffith, and Story-Telling

The other comparison that runs through the writing about film-and-literature is that between Griffith and Dickens, who was said to be the novelist's favorite novelist. The most famous account, of course, is that of Roosevelt who compares their "spontaneous childlike skill for story-telling"<sup>19</sup>; a quality he finds in American cinema at large, their capacity for involving "the characters, the visual power of such, their enormous popular success, and above all their rendering of parallel action, for which Griffith and Dickens are his models. On the face of it, there now seems nothing so



GRIFFITH: *Influence*

remarkable in these deliberations is to justify their being so frequently passed as examples of the rise that had cinema and the Victorian novel in fact Bresson's discussion of Dickens' "concrete techniques", including incorporation of such phenomena as frame composition and the close-up, is really not far from those many works which talk about film language, striking similar analogies, yet without giving adequate consideration to the qualitative differences required by the two media, to one of which the concept (e.g. language, frame composition) is literally applicable, to the other only metaphorically so.

Later assessments have readily extenuated Bresson's account. Bresson, for instance, states boldly that "Goffith stand in Dickens has for every one of his major innovations";<sup>12</sup> and Cohen, going further, poses to "the more or less blatant appropriations of the themes and contexts of the 19th century bourgeois novel".<sup>13</sup> However, in spite of the frequency of reference to the Dickens-Goffith connection, and apart from the historical importance of parallel editing as the development of film narrative, the influence of Dickens has perhaps been over-emphasized and under-scrutinized. One gets the impression that, many writers, except in a literary culture, have filled in the Dickens-Goffith comparison with a certain relief, perhaps as a way of arguing the cinema's respectability. They have tended to concentrate on the thematic interests and the large, broad narrative patterns and strategies the two great narrative-cultures shared, rather than to address themselves,

as a film-oriented writer might, to detailed questions of extension, of possible analogy and disparity between two different signifying systems, of the range of "functional equivalencies",<sup>14</sup> available to each within the parameters of the classical style as evinced in each medium.

#### Film and the Modern Novel

As film came to replace the representational novel of the earlier 19th century, it did so through the application of techniques practised by writers at the latter end of the century Conrad with his insistence on making the reader "see" and James with his technique of "discreased consciousness", both with their playing down of aural/oral mediation in favour of locating the point of view from which actions and objects are observed, provide obvious examples. In this way they may be said to have broken with the tradition of "transparency" in relation to the novel's referential world so that the mode and angle of vision were as much a part of the novel's content as what was viewed. The comparisons with cinematic techniques are clear but, paradoxically, the modern novel has not shown itself very adaptable to film. However, persuasively it may be demonstrated that the like of Joyce, Pudlak and Hemingway have drawn on cinematic techniques, the fact is that the cinema has been more at home with novels from — or descended from — an earlier period. Similarly, certain modern plays, such as *Death Of A Salesman* or *Equan*, which seem to owe something to cinematic techniques, have lost a good deal of their fluid representations of time and space when transferred to the screen.

#### Adaptation: The Phenomenon

As soon as the cinema began to see itself as a narrative entertainment, the idea of remaking the novel — that already established repository of narrative fiction — for screen emerged yet underway, and the process has continued more or less unabated for nearly 80 years. The reasons for this continuing phenomenon, as far as filmmakers are concerned, appear to move between the poles of commercialism and highbrowed respect for literary works. No doubt there is the lure of the pre-sold title, the assurance that respectability or popularity accrued to one medium might assist the work created in another. The notion of a potentially narrative "property" has clearly been at least one major influence in the filming of novels, and perhaps Bresson, at *Postman Ragnard* stoutly claims, "The known quantities ... they would sooner buy the rights of an expensive book than develop an original subject".<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, most of the filmmakers do record profits higher returns than these. DeWitt Bodeen, editor of the screenplay for Peter Ustinov's *Robt Maud* (1942), claims that: "Adapting literary works to film is, without a doubt, a creative undertaking, but the task requires a kind of selective interpretation, along with the ability to condense and sustain an established mood".<sup>16</sup> That is, the adapter sees himself as owing allegiance to the source work. Despite Peter Bresson's disclaimer about filming Henry James's *Daisy Miller* ("... I don't think it's a great classic every I don't treat it with that kind of reverence"), for much of the time the film is a consciousness visual translation of the original. One does not find filmmakers asserting a bold approach to their source material, any more than announcing crude financial motives.

As to audiences, whatever their opinions about this or

that violence of the original, they have continued to want to see what the books "look like". Constantly viewing these new visual images of the world of a novel and its people, they are interested in comparing their images with those created by the film-makers. But, as Christian Metz says, the reader "will not always find the film since what he has before him is the actual film in some somebody else's phantasy".<sup>1</sup> Despite the universality of projections, of finding audio-visual images that will coincide with their conceptual images, reader's never possess the power in providing audiences for "somebody else's phantasy". There is also a curious sense that the verbal actions of the people, place and place that make up much of the appeal of novels is simply an rendering of a set of events which ought not to easily be rendered in another. In this regard, one is reminded of Anthony Burgess's cynical view that "Every best-selling novel has to be turned into a film, the assumption being that the book itself when an opposite to the true fulfillment — the verbal shadow turned into light, the word made flesh".<sup>2</sup> And perhaps there is a parallel with that late 19th century phenomenon, described by Michael Chanan, in *The Death Of The Novel*, of illustrated editions of literary works and illustrated magazines in which great novels first appeared as serials. There is, it seems, an urge to have verbal concepts beamed forth as perceptual consciousness.

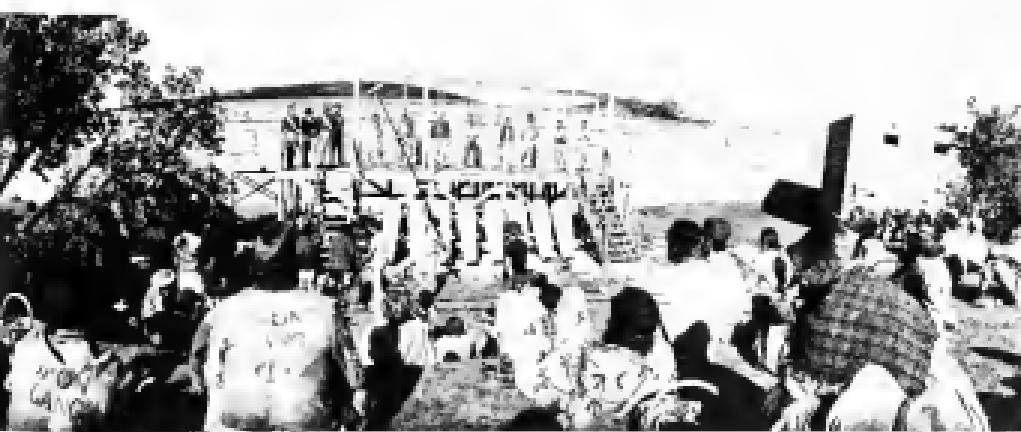
Whatever it is that makes film-makers want to use adaptations of novels, and filmmakers to produce them, and whatever hazards lie in the path for both, there is no denying the facts. For instance, Morton Bask reports that, since the inception of the Academy Awards in 1927-28, "more than three-fourths of the awards for 'best picture' have gone to adaptations".<sup>3</sup> And that the all-time box-office successes favor novels even more:<sup>4</sup> Given that the novel and the film have been the most popular narrative media of the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, it is perhaps not surprising that filmmakers have sought to exploit the kinds of response excited by the novel and have seen in the novel a source of ready-made material, in the

atmosphere of pre-existing names and characters, without too much concern for how much of the popularity of the original novel is intrinsically tied to an verbal story.

## NOTES

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Part two will examine the exploitation of the discourses on adaptation, and propose some new directions for discussion to take.



NOVEL APPROACH Great Expectations — The United Story

# THE WRITE STUFF

## A small-screen writer confesses: MICHAEL HARVEY sets out the trials and tribulations of writing for television

**T**HERE is a certain look which people give upon learning that you write for television. It is almost that of a broad-shouldered popular upon suddenly confronting a drowsy country squire. Shock, uncertainty, and then the final realization that someone who moments ago was an unknown, unknown then capable of wounding from afar was now the moral, vulnerable and wounded hollow threat. A prize to be picked at, examined, interrogated, and either summarily dealt with or paraded through the streets as an object of curiosity and derision.

The last such time was at a wedding. A perfectly amiable conversation about motherly, or raising a milk bar, or the short term prognosis of industrial lubricants was followed by the seemingly harmless query "So what do you do?" I recall muttering something about Television and approaching immediate success in the classic and letters sandwiches. Too late. I had already become a quack on the radar. "Television? You mean, *reality*?" "No, I help ... make it." I desperately switched my attention to the massage rolls, casting about as if looking for the source, but by now the guests had become a thrashing mob, the music blared and I looked on. "Oh, you? What ... *now*, *documentaries*?"

"Hi, drama ... you know, serials and things." It was now just a matter of seconds "Oh, really ... and do you *own* production?" "Well, actually ... I *wrote* them." Bang.

In the brief pause of confusion, paradox slowly unfurling, I forced myself for the inevitable retort. The person would hardly ever watch TV and what they did watch they would generally find to be rubbish, apart from the occasional good British program. In *reality* would I agree that Britain produced the best television in the world? ... It also produced some of the worst, just as we tended to see more of the former than the latter. That year in, year out Australian programs regularly headed our ratings lists. That given similar budgets and schedules, Australia (which on a per capita basis was already the most prolific and most efficient drama producer) could match it with the UK, the US, or anywhere else in the world for that matter, and indeed often did. All to no avail.

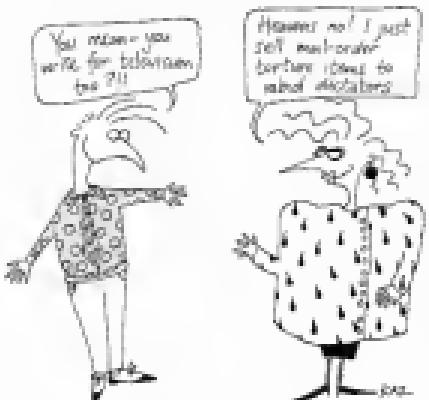
The arguments exhausted, the revolver pressed to my bowed neck, I would comfort myself with a few private thoughts. Deep down, a certain pride. The pride in performing one's craft in making an unworkable story work, an impossible sub-plot possible. In writing a love scene on the sconce because there was no money for an extra bedroom set. In understanding an entire re-write in five days because one of the actors, God bless them (and to thank women have problems), had collapsed from exhaustion. A pride in working (literally) through the night to complete an episode, walking out the front door for a breather at 5.30 am to find one's car had been stolen in the interim, and not ringing the police until 9.30 am for fear of interruption (it happened).

The weapons cooled, there would be a few wary murmurs too. "Contracting a payoff" is a line delivered some four seconds earlier, only to find upon viewing that the actor had changed the script and not bothered to change the pay-off. Cutting back some 10 minutes from a draft because the script editor had cited it so, only to witness the cast performing the work in presentist slow-motion like some Greek tragedy because the episode was now 10 minutes under. Spreading an entire weekend (at the cost of all social engagements) writing a lengthy SAS assault-course sequence so to find it later dropped because there was no money to buy the rope for the pyrotechnics.

The trigger pressed, the hammer falling, there would perhaps be just enough time to acknowledge a few datos. Awh, shiny lines, written in speed or in short desperation, earned out pure gold by some unknown scribe with little of any rehearsal. Weary, over-blown passages, reduced by a script-editor's pen to three lines of tame action. Yet another one-class somehow given life and originality because the production team have again managed to make \$1000 look \$100,000. And above all, despite the trials and tribulations, irony and criticism, the joy of seeing the result of one's labours, if only for a brief moment, actually working ... real drama ... the right stuff ... working before one's very eyes and the eyes of countless how many others ... in hundreds of thousands of homes ... people captured, satisfied, perhaps even moved.

"Really? You mean *Soappit*?" As I was pulled back to reality, I noticed something strange about my captor's face. It was almost smiling. And the hand was not holding a revolver, rather a bottle, steadily refilling my glass. "God, I'm an idiot. Can't remember." Then the realization hit me. I had drifted beyond the snags, come down behind friendly lines. It was a fun, I could have wry.

### SOCIAL OUTCASTS MEET





ONCE A MARINE: Gustav Hasford now

## THE WRITE STUFF

**What happens to a novelist whose first book becomes a Stanley Kubrick film? TRACY HAYWARD finds out from Gustav Hasford, whose first novel has been filmed as *Full Metal Jacket***

"The fight is made up and reflects... 'Vietnam created *Conrad*' — *The Short Timor* Agency" — *The Short Timor*

"However, General *Conrad* who they say was of Indian" — *The Short Timor* Agency (Unpublished).

**T**HE *Short Timor* is an epigrammatic, unashamedly brutal story of a US Marine's training at Parris Island — "no eight-week college for the playboy-tough and crazy-brave" — and his 365-day, short-term, tour of duty in Vietnam.

The book was published in 1979. It had taken the author seven years to write, and three years to find a publisher. Vietnam was not a popular topic only five years after the war, in a country that still wished it had won. Even after publication of what is considered one of the best works of fiction about the war, Hasford was still living in his Volkswagen and working as a security guard in California. And then Stanley Kubrick decided to make a film about it.

*Full Metal Jacket*, Kubrick's title, is a reference to the General Contractors requirement that military buildings be fully-coated in steel or copper, so that they cannot expand. Hasford wrote the script with Kubrick and Michael Herr, the author of *Desert One*. The film was shot in England. Areas of land and an abandoned gasworks in Essex were transplanted into Hue City at the time of the Tet offensive.

My copy of the Random edition of *The Short Timor* has a blue tent card on the title page: "For Tracy from Gustav Hasford May 1988". Has brought Publisher's Weekly to notice of 50 — smirks on writers' contracts — to the photocopying counter where I worked in the West Australian State Library. "We got talking," Guy likes to say. "What am I doing in *Perth*? Actually I was going to go to Geraldton, but

I decided that Perth was small town enough I had a team here [while he was in Vietnam] but a senior officer wiped it out before I was supposed to take off, I went to Hong Kong instead. Vietnam was a working class war. Not one country's son ever went to Vietnam. Pen writing into my contract for *The Phantom Riders* (the sequel to *The Short Timor*) that a stage is used to make of the 20th Congressmen.

"The image of the Vietnam veteran as a cold-blooded psychopath is something the US government started when men were coming back saying, 'The war is wrong — we shouldn't be there.' US servicemen don't say that sort of thing! They had to explain it away by saying that we were traumatised from seeing our friends blown up and didn't know what we were saying. Even us, 'the coldies and determined'. I've often been asked at interviews 'How many people did you kill in Vietnam?' Just like that. Actually my body count was a standing pile — I killed as many of them as they did of us."

In an article published in *American Pressthus* earlier this year Guy wrote: "Looking back now with flaws in hindsight, I hope I hit nothing but trees, and I hope the tree lived. If I did kill a human being in Vietnam, it was a tragic accident or self-defense; I regret it, but I do not apologize."

*The Short Timor* is not an autobiography, however, the main character, The Joker, played by Matthew Modine, has many similarities to Guy.

He is six feet four, a farm boy from Alabama who joined up on short time at 19 (he had landed from a local on the Draft Board that his number was coming up). After Marine training at Parris Island in North Carolina, he was made a war correspondent with Leakeyback, the Marine magazine, and served with the same Division at The Joker, though I'm not sure about the Peace Badges on the battle fatigues ... I have a photograph of Guy that I thought at first was of Martin Sheen; he is 19, handsome and grim, wearing a flak jacket. There are sandbags and machine gun cranes in the background; it is the Tin offensive, and he has just been on battle. It is an interesting contrast to the other photograph: the 39-year-old Guy, spectacled, still grim-looking, still in fatigues and consisting of a crewcut ("Once a Marine, always a Marine") on the shoot of Stanley Kubrick's later project.

The film had been rescheduled for Christmas 1988 release, but when Modine broke his arm during shooting and the schedule was thrown off by about six weeks, the date was changed to summer 1989. "They only ever launch major films on the 15th of November or in Christmas — they go the best box office from college kids on holiday."

Guy says he expects to make about \$1 million from the sale of the film rights. *The Short Timor*: "Even a dad film will sell about two million copies in the US — even *Beep* sold two million! If Stanley was to make the worst movie he'd ever make, it'd still be a Stanley Kubrick movie. Most of my friends are middle-aged accountants and educators, not writers or actors. They make about \$30,000 a year. I've been writing for 20 years — I've really just made the same as they have, but in one lump sum."

By Christmas Guy was still in Perth, now in Laguna Beach in California as planned. He and Kubrick, having settled a disagreement about credits, were still discussing payment. He had finished *The Phantom Riders*, and was waiting for a response from publishers. I was given a copy, recently bound in peace of Swan Lager carton. The Phantom >



MARINE BOY: Gustav Hasford in 1988

\* Blauper was a Marine myth Gao often heard about when interviewing for *Lawbreak* — men would speak of a tall Marine with a red band around his wrist, fighting with the Viet Cong to the hills. Says The Joke in *The Phantom Blauper*: "Everyone knew deep down that if we looked at the war in logical and set patriotic or emotional terms, we'd probably all have packed up with him." The novel executes a remarkable plot twist that is convincing, absorbing and suspenseful — I prefer it to *The Sheet*. Gao was flattered, and decided to name a character after me; there is now an 11-year-old Vietnamese prostitute called Tracy.

It was two in the afternoon. Gao had just got up after writing all night, when it is quiet, and there are fewer distractions. He talked me into going to see *Streetwise Rags*, a film low on my list that I didn't enjoy any more than I expected to.

"There were a lot of complaints about the language in that, and Marine officers distanced themselves from it. I got the language complaints too, but I actually toned down the language — everything a Marine says is dirty!"

Gao had just begun to write detective novels, and they seemed to be coming along easily. When he gets back to the States he wants to work on a project about *Ambergris Beach*, and plans a novel — the *Castlevania* answer to *The Red Badge Of Courage*. There is a third book about The Joke, involving the Vietnam Veterans Against The War movement, of which Gao was a part. Then he'll have that out of his system.

We talk and talk, the sky lightens over the city skyline, five o'clock jiggers appear. Gao suggests we walk back around the river and get some breakfast in the city. I haven't slept for 20 hours, and I'm turning green. "You've hit the wall," says Gao proudly. A helicopter booms over the river, Gao gazing. It reminds him of having a remote drum land on his head during a supply drop.

In McDonald's, the first place to open, among bags packed out of myfam's costumes, Gao starts to ramble. "At one time I had two dollars a day to eat on — I lived on the Mac or Kentucky Fried lunch offer for eight months. I was living in a closet in a friend's art gallery — I had my typewriter in there, a bed and a shelf. Another time when I was broke I interviewed my flattmate — Harlan Ellison, he's a science fiction writer, he wrote *A Boy And His Dog*. He didn't mind what I said about him, so long as I didn't mention that he wrote *showcage*."

A while ago I received my last letter from Gao, he was about to leave, finally, for the States. "The local blizzard of mailed stars is about to bury me. The trailer to Stanley's movie is showing in America now, and it mentions my name, as the cyber-journalists will be after me to chase all the past out of me like a piece of gum." He had just seen *Phantom* ("it's really depressing, the son of a gun I'd like to make about Vietnam"), and enclosed an article he'd written for *The West Australian* about the career暮 of Hollywood Vietnam films. Unfazed by the snubism, or the competitive, he is delighted that veterans around of "Hollywood Japans Commandos" are getting their voices heard. It has taken this long, he thinks, for the war to be fit enough to be considered history, but, as he said in the last line of the article in *The West Australian* "History is not over yet, and history collects its debts." On the back of the letter was a photocopy of a telegram from London, saying, in only slightly different words, "The cheque's in the mail. Best regards, Stanley Kubrick."

## THE WRITE STUFF

Novelist and writer Angela Carter has had two of her works transferred to the screen. The film based on her novel *The Magic Toyshop* will shortly be seen in Australia. STEPHANIE BUNBURY talked to her about screenplays, dialogue, adolescence and the supernatural.



CHOKES HOLD Tessa Dahl as Uncle Philip, Patricia Routledge as Aunt Margaret

**C**hapham has probably always had a betting shop, an elevated store with wire grilles over the windows, and shabby insurance agents with educative pictures of household items piled in front of the windows. These days, Chapham, grumpy old Chapham where Nell Dunn broke middle-class bounds in the states to go Up The Junction, has a wife bar too. A wife bar, Lord love us! And it's not the Cornishwoman it's Chapham.

Chapham also has Angie Carter, 47, woman of leisure, celebrated socialite, florist, novelist and, more recently, screenwriter on subjects fantastic, but she's not going to change in a hurry. Her old house is still a renovator's dream, with bayonetts on the hall and piles of whisking on the chairs. The front room is lined with enough toys to dress the set of *The Magic Toyshop*, her second novel back in 1987 and now her second film script (the first was *Company Of Wolves*). Good cheer prevails among the mice. Her person has no fallen prey to the deviators either. Her hair is a dolphin silver bush, and her body, which has clearly spent most of its time behind a desk while the brain buzzed, sits comfortably into the upholstering of the couch. She speaks slowly and measuredly. Come what may, she is recovering into solidly middle-aged age.

London she says, has changed a good deal. She thinks mostly of the late postwar days before youth culture hit town, let alone papier-mâché. *The Magic Toyshop* is set in those years and is full of nostalgia.

"London had a sort of trusted quality," she says. "It was sort of like an Eastern European city, without very much advertising. Nobody was very rich. There were free classical music concerts in public parks, everyone had enough to eat but not too much. It was always rather cold and uncomfortable under Arches, but it was kind of 'healthy' disconnected somehow."

You wouldn't expect this sort of pessimism, not from this woman, not from the woman whose stock in trade is the bizarre women with wings, vampires, werewolves, strange couplings, sinister chambers full of flickering candlelight, rooms full of extravagance and volupt. *The Magic Toyshop* is the story of these children who are oppressed suddenly and are sent to live with strange Uncle Philip, arch-manipulator, his club with Masquer and Margaret's dancing, fidelity like birth. Philip makes ingenious traps and manoeuvres and confines the family to his domain of make-believe. His most dismaying drives are projected on to 11-year-old Melaine, who is compelled to act the role of revolting Linda opposite a huge even more monstrous.

In the book, Philip's croissants are drenched in the horror of his character. The film makes this latent threat manifest with the help of the supervisor, the oven has its own appetites, pictures move, puppets come to life and run riot, and Melaine's brother Jonathan runs away to see through the painted bough that forms the backdrop to the Linda tableau. It is a maze of the macabrely whimsical, more or less what you might associate with Angie Carter, but not exactly her style. Too big by half.

It comes as a surprise how forcefully down to earth she is, in person. She is not, she says flatly, interested in the occult. She did once go to a geomancer in Japan, but when interrogated her about it, was told that he warned her against trusting people with black hair, when he himself was Japanese and very black of hair indeed. She likes that sort of quiddities. Her stories brim with whimsy but the regalia and oddities have with fascination than a cool sympathy. "I'm a perennial



PUPPET MASTER Uncle Philip and his manipulates.

student of human folly," she says, "and, you know, the one thing we can be sure of is that whatever those people had been up to they were not guilty of the excesses of which they'd been convicted, which I think is a silly way to renounce." These are the facts — she is a student for facts.

She likes fairy stories too, because they are the fables handed down by those who left no other trace the stories, the educational courses. They are the only historical reminders of people who have vanished. Now the publications for *The Magic Toyshop* are trying to dab her the magical nature of English letters, and, as her mild way she won't have a Gabriel García Márquez come out of Catholic South America. She came out of South London and the Welfare State. Different history altogether. Let's get that straight.

The supervillain elements in *The Magic Toyshop*, she says, come largely from the director, David Whately, who had gotten working connections with South America, as it happens. "He likes doing it," she says, "and I was say" And something had to crystallise the essence of the story into concrete images. She is laudable in the face of the demands of the medium. The story itself was full of holes, which gaped once the novel's language was stripped away. "The holes can't be left empty, they're there to reader to imagine what's going on, because that's not how the cinema works," she says, then adds "It could be how the cinema worked, but it would be cinema of a different kind, operating at a different level. This is a straightforward narrative movie." There were certain pressures from the *Company* producers, who insisted everything should be explained.

Working with a group on film is fun, she says. It gets her out of a chair, out of the house, and she meets different people, non-bookish people, like the ones who make the gaudish werewolf transformations for *The Company Of Wolves* and were, she says with relish, "extremely odd." So she will not do more than snarls vaguely and darkly about producer intrusions, apart from unnameable somebody who are quoted as saying "They won't stand for this, you know" when anything strange came up in the dialogue. Her fault, she says briefly, for engaging with expansion. It's not for her to whinge and moan.

The joys of *The Magic Toyshop*, however, certainly come from her. Toys are cool enough. The novel before *The Magic Toyshop*, *The Shadow Dancer*, was set in a junkshop. "I like design," she says firmly. "I could have gone into the second-hand business in those days. I spent a lot of time in auctions and swapmeet things around. I had a passion for antiques at one stage, I think it's the seductiveness of brassy things that I'm interested in. I stop short of being interested in robots." Her three-year-old son Alva, who romps around her like a dolphin throughout the interview, has quite a collection of art toys from mother, but oddly "he prefers small metal automobiles." She watches indulgently as he whizzes the wheels of two little cars against each other.

As the centre of *The Magic Toyshop* is Melaine, vulgar &



MIRROR, MIRROR: *Carrie* Mirrors *as* *Melanie*

but knowing, almost, but not quite, grown up, and confused with a bit more spice in the film than in the original. *Melanie* is pure Carter: her stories are full of girls dressing up, taking on, taking their desires by the horns. The fact the *Melanie* story grapples with puberty in a bathhouse of make-believe is a more serious on the red struggle, as the writer remembers it:

"I seemed to grow up," she says. "I seemed real young. And I thought the adult world would come as some sort of accrescence of grace.... One day I'd wake up and I'd be like *Jesus Christ* in a black dress.

"But many things about the adult world seemed to me profoundly strange. I didn't know what was going on at all....

The whole business for me of growing up was very much tied up with going to work. I was a reporter, and the whole super-casual atmosphere, the little temperature, the psychology for position, the business about by-lines — I thought I'd left all that behind at primary school. The mercilessness of people — my goodness and Certainly one had entered a really成人世界 where anything could happen!"

Uncle Philip as embodiment of import is: Gross and ballyhooing in the book, he is less and preposterous in the film, an accidental result of editing. Tim Bell as Tim Philip Powers goes looks alarmingly like Norman Tebbit, Chairman of the Conservative Party. The note, originally chosen for his 'bad eyes', apparently studied Tebbit, a close, green public figure, and has presented a brand of crudely much more substantial than the sort depicted in the novel: it has become the right, albeit crassly of the taurine chamber electric expert. Yet his sham surprise, according to Angela Carter, is "not as bad as the real world!" This she explains as if it were entirely self-evident.

Among her earlier writings, she says, it was only the

fantasy novels which demonstrated an understanding of the power she had. The more realistic novels, the novels about people she knew when she was young and unusually unhappy, have much darker sexual politics. They have, too, a "dismayed, hallucinatory quality" she likes. And from those planes, she is rather surmising about her apprenticeship works:

"I did everything on a wing and a prayer," she says. "You can't use the word 'bad' about them, they're not bad novels because they're not even like novels, they're not even instances of novels, they're doing something else.... One of the really difficult things about making a script out of *The Magic Toyshop* is when I read it again I realized it didn't have a plot.

"It had a vague beginning, and an end but not much middle. And one of the things this particular kind of film needed was a coherent narrative structure, so one had to reassemble the novel as that film." Characters, dialogue, all the workable things of the realist novel were mysterious to her, although she thinks she has improved these days, partly under the regimen of film and radio drama's formal demands.

"I used to be hapless at dialogue. I could never write a conversation. This is partly because I could never understand why people filled up pages of novels with 'Have a cup of tea — come again?' — 'You thank you' — and expected not to pay money for that?" She chuckles. Angela Carter laughs vigorously and often, especially at her own shortcomings. The dialogue in this film, as it happens, is very much like that in the book and it seems to stand up quite well in being spoken.

She laughs, too, at her own inconsistencies. She finds easy with them I might find it passing that the writer who delights in portraying the underbelly of sexuality, understanding decent expectations, is disturbed that the central character in *The Company Of Women* is only 14 and that there were traces of holdover, she believes, in the film. But she does not. Literature is different. Her fictional characters and romances, her political writings warn that the sentimental excess is in demonstrating an audience bondage; back in the real world, all she can say about it is that everybody seems someone to love. She writes about writers more easily because she regards society so sceptically. Her most recent novel, *Nights At The Circus*, featured an amorous-syndicalist week, *Luna*. The week is the adherent of a joke: when Angela Carter, in her bemused way, asked a friend why he thought there were many hookups with names like *deodorants* which made fell-attract feelings lie down with the aerosol, which could be guaranteed to knock the *Commissar* *Ming-Ming* and the *Tarot Pack*, he suggested it was because everyone knew that nothing worked. She liked the idea, hence *Luna*.

But in the novel *Luna*'s necromancy and subterfuge are both successful. Of course. Stands to reason. "Fiction isn't about life, you know," Angela Carter laughingly. Of course, I should have known. Stands to reason. "It's about what we hope for from life. Not about what we are, but what we might be. And we might be. I like to think. I get more cheerful as I get older, though I can't think why!"

She smiles benignly out at the grey sky over Clapham. Also walks up and down with a walking stick on his head. A builder is looking at the bathroom which had been suspended in under the stairs. We are a long way from *The Magic Toyshop*.



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- The Witches Of Eastwick

## • THE WITCHES OF EASTWICK

Last eve stormy night in a little town called Eastwick three unusually beautiful women meet over a pitcher of moonshine to bemoan the shortage of eligible husband-cutter cases.

Alma (Diane) is a leggy, career-harried widow with one child and a cottage business in oily-poly clay figurines. Jane (Dianne Sorensen), the timid, childless divorcee, is music instructor at the local primary school. And Sada (Michelle Pfeiffer) is a smirky but rather wised abandoned mother of two and reporter for the local rag.

"He should be handsome," "But not too handsome," "But eyes, he's got to have great eyes," "Handsome," "And romantic." Feature by feature feature they dream up the perfect mate until Jane, to the amazement of her compa-  
nions, concludes that he should ride into town on a big black steed. Out to explore and the driving rain is a big black

Mercedes bunch through the gates of Eastwick.

*The Witches Of Eastwick* is a thoroughly entertaining movie. With Jack Nicholson in the lead role as the devil himself, fine performances by the three wacky coeds, and a stellar job by Veronica Cartwright in the supporting role as Eastwick's local "bitchster" and prude, there's plenty of professionalism.

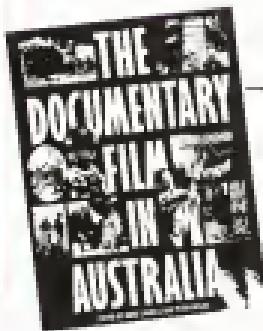
Maybe a bit too much. Everyone can see that the film is a Hollywood hoot. The director of photography, Vilmos Zsigmond, was at *Close Encounters*, the composer, John Williams, composed the music for, among other things, *Star Wars*, *Superman*, and *E.T.*; the production designer, Polly Mellen, is the ex-wife of Peter Bogdanovich, with whom she made *The Last Picture Show*. And the director is Australia's own George Miller of *Mad Max* fame. There's no thin on this film.

*The Witches Of Eastwick*, based on the novel by John Updike, is according to its publicists, "a supernatural thriller in a



JACK NICHOLSON: LIBRARY

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the 1980s that is also a comic battle of the sexes." If there is anything to object to it is probably that last bit. A fair few minutes of the film are devoted to the kind of eighteen relationship talk that makes you shift around in your seat. But just when you think it may be time for popcorn someone puts a pen to the balloon.

Daryl Van Horne (Nicholson) is a smugging fat, smugging bald, exceedingly rich eccentric. He racks up to Eastwick (was he assassinated?), buys the local heritage home, installs his seven foot sofa, and sets to work creating the three women's dreams come true. To each of them he is just what the doctor ordered: a good fuck, a man gay, a liberator and a temptress.

At least that's what the devil is supposed to be. But in a fabulously comic scene with Cher in which Nicholson leads her on a tour to the master bedrooms, every conversation of the seduction scene is blown wide open. Cher's no dummy, thinks her middle name Jack Nicholson no longer looks like anybody's idea of a laugh, is thinking seriously, and Cher doesn't care if the tells him so.

But if there's no getting around the fact that Jack Nicholson no longer looks like anybody's hero, there's also no getting around the fact that that's exactly what he is. His performance is, as always, fantastic. His mood shifts, the range of expression, the timing — he is exuberantly witty and incisive by turns. You'd almost think that the movie was a paean to his skill and accomplishments as an actor.

Not that this is the last thing he's ever done. But there are echoes of all the other Nicholsons we've known and loved, not least of them the totally demented "Here's Johnny" of *The Shining*. In fact, there are lots of echoes in this film. Like the best of the contemporary Hollywood's productions, *The Witches Of Eastwick* is meta-filmic. It's even been suggested that certain magic scenes are more than a little reminiscent of *Mary Poppins*.

It comes as no surprise to find that the producers of *The Witches Of Eastwick* were responsible for the comic horror movie *An American Werewolf In London*. That's the genre we're dealing with. But this is a much glossier film, a much more self-conscious, a much slicker film than its predecessor. Take Jack Nicholson's wardrobe, to begin with. As befits a man of wealth and taste, he sports not only a pony tail with what's left of his hair, but a mix of strawberry baggies.

It's a lavish production and no mistake. Not a penny spared in, to



JACK NICHOLSON: Temptation

begin with, the search for the right location. Polly Platt and the location manager, we are informed, logged over 20,000 miles throughout the northwestern US and northern California (ask me why) in their search for the perfect New England village. At length they found the ideal spot: Cohasset, Massachusetts, right next door to Plat's hometown. Why they ever looked farther than their own backyard is a mystery only Hollywood can solve.

But you get all the pay-offs of the big expense. It wouldn't do to underplay the devil's powers and some of the effects are bizarre. If there are some needlessly unnecessary ones (a final after-life extravagance comes less than essential) it's only in keeping with the generally luxurious mood of the film.

If there's anything in matter about it might be the broad politics of *The Witches Of Eastwick*. You could say, for instance, that we hardly need another demonstration of the unreliability of unadulterated masculine domination. Or that Cher, Susan Sarandon, and Michelle Pfeiffer, at least two of whom are powerful and formidable sirens, are reduced in this film to legs and fluffy hair. That there is not much scope for anything more than the reiteration of the most conventional and apprehensive sexual relationships. Even that the pigs the movie takes at the partition of the average New Englander are predictably clichéd.

The answer to these charges is presumably to be found in the reversal of fortune conclusion, which makes a gesture toward self-determination and lifting of the patriarchal yoke. Sort of.

Actually, this kind of analysis, though theoretically applicable to anything and

everything, seems essentially out of place when it comes to *The Witches Of Eastwick*. In a world in which there are three kinds of movies, the Dumbfounding, the Liberating, and the Fun, there is no mystery as to which category this one falls into. It hardly takes itself seriously. I don't see why we should do any different. And, really, you could do a hell of a lot worse with a movie after noon.

Christine Thompson

The Witches Of EASTWICK. Directed by George Miller. Producers: Ned Corcoran, Peter Guber. Associate Producers: Ross Cohen, Sam Devlin, Steven Soderbergh. Casting: Michael Cieply. Director of Photography: Harold Ramis. Editors: Richard P. Mandelbaum, Hubert C. De La Motte. Music: John Williams. Production design: Polly Platt. Costumes: Helen Gunn. Home: Other. Music: "Heddy" (Suzanne Vega, Kiki Dee); "I'm Not Your Baby" (Dionne Warwick, Jennifer Holliday, Mariah Carey). Film: "I'm Not Your Baby" (Jennifer Holliday); "I'm Not Your Baby" (Dionne Warwick, Jennifer Holliday); "I'm Not Your Baby" (Dionne Warwick, Jennifer Holliday). 118 minutes. USA. 1987.

## • RAISING ARIZONA

*Raising Arizona* might have been made decades ago if Ethan Arbus had been asked to direct the *Road Runner* cartoons. Whether consciously or not, Ethan Coen (the producer) and Joel Coen (the director) owe plenty to both Arbus's unapologetic view of the ordinary, and the *Road Runner's* ability to zoom blithely across the surface of the Western landscape. This analogy is only one of a series of unlikely comparisons and pastiches of cinematic modes which *Raising Arizona* employs in telling its story of ex-con Al ("Al") McDonough, his wife, an-epicurean Edwina ("Ed"), and their adolescent

accept to complete the family unit with a "little sister" (Dolly).

In an extended prologue, which uses a highly skilled condensation of narrative conventions, we witness Hi's sorry track record in "romantic/sexual behaviour" — he rapidly sets "convenience women" (the American equivalent of our T-11s) with an unashamed gusto and a looked-for getaway car. Each time he is caught, he uses policewoman Ed (Holly Hunter) in the 15 seconds or so it takes for her to snap his mug shot. He goes to prison, gets parole, and then the cycle starts over. The fourth time around, Hi (Nicolas Cage) decides to "go straight." He marries Ed and they move to a small house in the middle of a prairie where they spend their "sulid days" — Hi works at a factory drilling holes into small bits of metal. Ed gets up work and starts wearing makeup. The only thing missing is the child which will turn their happy union into a family. But Ed discovers that she is infertile, and they

can't adopt because of Hi's record. Their world, based upon strict separation from normality, begins to fall apart. That's when they hear of the Arizona quadruplets — five babies born to Nathan Coons, owner of a chain of separated farmsteads. They get a horrifying idea. The film appears, the film begins.

By this time we have become familiar with the style which the Coons are employing. A succession of distorted, colourful comic images, often shot in wide angle, emphasize the bizarre or rocky (as with the Coons brothers), such as Hi and Ed on vinyl banana boogies watching the sun set across an empty horizon. Nature has fled the window, replaced by a kind of hyper-reality within a self-conscious sphere of improbability where almost anything is permissible. For example, Hi would have spent a maximum of four years in prison between the first shot and his first parole (all within the first 18

minutes) but not only does he appear the same age, he wears the same clothes! Humour is often situated between the ironic banality of Hi's point of view — he wants to be a good, honest man but struggles against both his weak nature and the call of the commercial sex trade — and the hyperreal exaggeration of surreal sexual behaviour. Hi's version of a lullaby to the baby she and Hi have kidnapped is a ballad about a man condemned to hang.

The style constantly refers back to children's cartoons where bright colours and naive, literal logic mix it with violence and explicit content. It is a world where weakness reigns, and the character competes with the visual gag for attention. Actually there is little attempt to make 'real' characters. Notions of 'the real' are tossed playfully into the air. Everyone is essentially caricatured, as flat and as bright as the abundance of visual sensations surrounding them. Children's cartoons, however, have the good sense to last for no more than a few minutes, and that is where *Raising Arizona* starts getting into trouble.

The film is operating in terms which are, at their root, alienating. We are constantly being held at a distance. For instance, we are distanced from the characters by their lack of credibility. Our notion of realism is a film character only upon a sophisticated exchange of 'conviction' from our (audience's) point of view for credibility from them. If a character extends beyond an acceptable logical boundary, it begins to move into the realm of caricature. It becomes increasingly difficult to locate ourselves within their world. Instead, we observe them, more cruelly, from the outside.

The general tone of *Raising Arizona* is more distasteful. Often the form of the humour comes from a play with memory. The style emphasizes self-consciousness — the careful placement of objects and colour — and authored presence. Given that its primary effect is the way it establishes the wackiness, *Raising Arizona* subtracts charm for more familiar audience interests. This amounts to a point. There would be few scenes in the contemporary drama as charming and full of pure delight as the one where Hi first tries to kidnap one of the five Arizona babies. But there is always the threat of that charm wearing thin and, after half an hour or so, it does. You become immune to the barrage of highly-crafted, beautifully art directed, self-consciously photographed scenes.

In choosing to use highly-stylized visual exaggeration, the Coons find themselves with a critical distance between the film and the audience. Instead of using this to some effect, they spend most of the film trying to counteract the structures which they themselves set up within the first 12 minutes. *Raising Arizona* seems to undergo a series of shifts in mode, from absurdist to



BROTHERS IN SHADES: Joel (left) and Ethan Coen

'adventure' to 'thriller' and ending in tragic amnesia, from *Red Phoenix* to *The Water Will Find*.

The first shift occurs when the plot turns to take over Ed and his son Nathan. Nathan Jr (Gale and Evelyn (John Goodman and Bill Forsyth), two prison escapees and friends of Hi, land on their doorstep. Hi dreams the Lone Rider of the Apaches into existence — a frightening hairy biker (Tex Cobb) from the Mad Max desert, who eventually comes after young Nathan Jr for the reward Nathan Sr offers. Hi loses his job after dragging his boss for negotiating with swaggers and, in despair, tries to rob a convenience store. Gale and Gale kidnap Nathan Jr for the beauty he has, laughably, while robbing a bank. The Lone Rider turns up, as do the enraged Ed and Hi. All of that plot seems to roll over rather than repair the causal problem. The intermissions and disarray of these twists and turns pull and, after being completely absorbed in the story, I found myself growing weary as the film wore on.

*Blue Velvet*, which bears comparison (mainly due to its erotic detachment from the 'ordinary') bridges the distance through the use of threat and an overwhelming endorsement of sexuality and violence. *Raging Angels* assumes a similar shift, but the transition is far more problematic. Threat is undermined by everyone's cartoon-like evanescence — big shots are big but no one ever gets big, and whilst *Blue Velvet* was able to shift into a thriller mode without an interruption to its stylized flow, *Raging Angels* jumps, like a car out of gear, from gear to gear.

A more fundamental bridge is needed between audience and character. Obviously, Hi is meant to fulfil that role. His monologues are representations of an internal process, a 'self' character, through whom we, the audience, can enter the narrative. This only partially works. Although he is sweet and lovable, his singular presence as a 'character' (rather than 'character' in this formulation) only serves to further heighten one's sense of isolation. Hi, the 'character', is excluded from the narrative. His introspection is always conveyed directly to the audience. When he sits within the film, he sits as 'character'.

Without being able to assert a stronger emotional value for his character, the ending, where Hi dreams of himself and Ed with their own huge family of children and grandchildren at Thanksgiving, is quite peculiar. You can admire the way it undercuts itself, the obvious manipulation of conventional codes of acceptability for humour, but there is also something missing. Perhaps an underlying affection for these 'weird' cartoonish characters from both the filmmakers and the audience, comes against that impenetrable, ironic closure.

There are many possible readings of

*Raging Angels*. I have discussed an operational difficulty, or 'why I lost interest in spite of being bowled over by the first half', without tackling other possibilities, such as the sense of 'The Family' or the recurring metaphor of birth, fertility/birth and the desert. I chose this track because ultimately I think that the Olsen brothers, like all good creators of pseudoscientific dispensations, soon grow bored in their giddy glee in pursuit of something more spectacular.

#### Top Apropos

**RAISING ARIZONA.** Directed by Jim Jarmusch. Producers Ethan Coen, Schuyler Wren and Joel Coen. Co-producers Mark Rosenberg, Dennis Lehane, James Lecesne. Associate producer Dennis Lehane. Director of photography Barry Sonnenfeld. Editor Michael P. inter. Production designer James Morris. Art director James Morris. Costumes: Costumes: Gregg Hall. Music: Harry Nilsson. Cast: John Goodman, Bill Forsyth, John Goodman, John Goodman, Ethan Coen, Dennis Lehane, Jim Jarmusch, John Goodman, Gregg Hall, Harry Nilsson, Tex Cobb, Leland Orser, T.J. Lowther, Lori Loughlin, Lynn Cohen, Ken Foree, Amy Madigan, Dennis Lehane, Tom Cavanagh, Steven B. Kellman. USA. 1987.

## • LONG BOW TRILOGY

In *Long Bow Trilogy*, Corma Harren and Richard Gordon break down the barriers of mystery, suspicion and political distrust that have foiled the efforts of many a foreign documentary-maker in China. Considering that the latest official policy is religious tolerance, for example, it's not easy to capture on film the sight of a native flapping his arms like angel wings as he recites Catholic views on heaven. Nor is it a simple matter to get factory workers to discuss, on the record, details of a walk-out protest in a country which claims to have eliminated exploitation — and outlawed industrial strikes. The directors' sympathetic cameras even draw an embittered outburst from one old woman against her husband, who, she says, has "never treated me like a human being".

Long Bow is the village in north China which William Hunter, Corma Harren's father, summarised in the ►



SPICE IN SPLENDOR: Scene from *Longbow Trilogy*

a book *Peasants*, an account of land reform there during the Communist revolution. His second book on Long Bow, based on visits he made to the village in the seventies, was called *Steeples*. Charles had accompanied him on these research trips. She and Richard Gordon returned to Long Bow in 1983 and 1985 to make the intimate, three-part documentary on the village.

Oddly, the film's narration fails to mention the special links that the documentarians had with the community they are filming. Boston says only that she is an American born in Beijing, a Chinese speaker and that she first visited the village in 1971. Yet clearly, the director's personal experiences within that community have guided their documentary approach, making it something more and something less than the casual look at Chinese village life which it appears to be.

During the Cultural Revolution, Corpus Boston was as deeply involved with Chinese factional politics as she became one of China's only foreign Red Guards. The *Long Bow Trilogy*, however, makes only the most fleeting reference to the Cultural Revolution, which lasted from 1966-76, preferring to focus instead on the quality of life before and after the 1979 "Liberation". Yet we need look no further than Steeples to learn that in the Cultural Revolution the village became a "battleground" where political disagreements were settled with rifles, pitch and hand grenades — surely, this did something to the fabric of ordinary life that is worth recording.

In Steeples, Corpus's father is frank about his reservations at the breakup of China's rural communes by the post-Mao leadership under Deng Xiaoping. You wonder if the documentarii feel the same way. Are we missing a crucial subtext of these films?

In "All Under Heaven" we are treated to interviews with a select handful of cadres and peasant activists, all of whom are unhappy with Deng's economic reforms and mourn the demise of collective farming. Yet it's well known that many grassroots cadres throughout China chiefly mourn the loss of power which economic decentralisation has caused for them. Generally, Chinese farmers seem to have welcomed the reforms, and in many places, living standards have risen as a result of them. Is Long Bow atypical, or is it that we have only been introduced to people whose views most closely match the documentarii? We cannot know, but we must wonder.

Ends Jellicoe

LONG BOW TRILLOGY: *Steeples* (Chesnethings) (Part 1: "The Good Harvest") (Part 2: "The Good Harvest: Life in a Chinese Village", Part 3: "To Tasty & Harmonious Home: Good Ancestors And Migrants in A Chinese Village") (Directed by Corpus Boston and Richard Gordon; Produced by Corpus Boston; Screenplay: Corpus Boston and Richard Gordon; Directed by Corpus Boston; Laura Cook, John Gossage; Director of photography: Richard Gordon; Editor: Corpus Boston; Producers: Richard Gordon; Longbow Chinese Pictures; Distributor: Riverfront) (A 35mm film, 198-200).

## • THE PLACE AT THE COAST

There is a curious sense of timeliness about *The Place At The Coast*. The place, Kilkee, is special, extraordinary, separate from the real world. It is a place where living and beautiful memories are made, and a suitable setting for momentous events. When Ellie McAdam and her father Neil go to Kilkee for their summer holiday, we become privy to one of these episodes in life that will always remain whole, decided, and Testimoneable in the minds of the participants.

For all the major characters, this summer is a time of change, and change in various guises is also the central concern. Ellie (Tobina Bergen) is rapidly approaching adolescence in blissful ignorance. For her it is time to face the larger questions of like boys, feelings, romance — and progress. Adolescence is her father's problem too, and not only as a result of Ellie's blind floundering into maturity. The laconic widower, played by John Hargreaves, is suddenly 17 and starting again when he meets Margot Ryan (Heather Marshall), a neighbour's charming daughter.

A storm is brewing, both literally and figuratively. On day one in Kilkee, Ellie and the environment are buffeted by a powerful, unmerciful wind, ruffling the tranquillity of both. The clouds build with the seasons as relationships begin to shift and sever, and as a flurry of rumours gain substance, there are plans about to develop Kilkee. It seems that Ellie is alone in her fight to preserve her place in the world. Her only possible allies have been disturbingly transformed from mutual human beings into people in love.

The film demands our support for Ellie's cause — Kilkee contains some of the most beautiful elements of the Australian bush and coast, and an environmentalist Jeff Daniels's harsh piles on an aquatic dreamlike quality. However, we are offered little hope for its survival. A powerful and ruthless businessman holds the delegation for progress, backed by a conglomeration of locals made strong by self-interest. Ellie is just a girl, and Neil and Margot are unfortunately unapologetic.

The closing scenes hold ambivalence and a vague feeling of irresolution. The maturing we have witnessed is merely the precursor to the many adjustments Margot, Neil and Ellie will have to make



FERN CALLS *Tobina Bergen in The Place At The Coast*

before relationships subside and the transitional cycle is complete. We are convinced, however, that the trio will eventually find their own happy equilibrium. The change is natural, and inevitable. The transformation of Kiley — for which the catalysts are, equally, anxiety and greed — is another natural sequence.

It used to be embarrassingly easy to recognise an Australian feature film — they tended to be raw, and awkward, with the characters generally balanced precariously between chaotic and caretaking. This, happily, is no longer the case. Our films now distinguish themselves more by their understandings. The humour and the drama are rather low-key, the colours rich and muted. The productions have coherence and assurance, but thankfully without Hollywood's gloss and bravado.

The comedy, when it plays out, is deflagrated. The drama runs conformably on solid scripting and characterisation, and evocative mise-en-scene. Films like *Star* and *Abalone* excelled in these areas, and they are some of the charms of *The Pier At The Coast*.

*Abalone* **Reviews**

**THE PIER AT THE COAST** Directed by George Ogden. Produced: Peter Purting. Screenplay: Harry Purting. Director of photography: Jim Dungey. Cost: Nicolas Beaumont. Production designer: Denis Pellerin. Music: Chris West. Cast: John Hargreaves (Bob McLeary), Heather Stewart (Maggie Ryan), Turkiya Bergen (Julie McLean), Margot Leaf (Muriel Ryan), Wayne Pellow (Steve Rogers), Mary McDonald (Janine Bourne), Jack Hayman (Bob's colleague), Ray Meagher (John). Coop: Michael Hordern (Artie Hordern). Production company: Creative 2 Pictures/BroadVision Film Corporation. Distributor: Foton. 90mm 100 minutes. Australia. 1987.

## • HIGH TIDE

Cinema has no shortage of traumas, but "One director, one story" is raising the more valid of them.

Gillian Armstrong's story, in which she returns to every film, is that of a woman faced with a crucial career choice. As she surveys a range of attractive alternatives, various tried men and one serious one vie for her attention. But in the end the object of them, shooting to go on unloved but independent.

Elements of this theme are apparent even in Armstrong's apprentice works, particularly *The Stage And The Dance* (through the girl, to the chagrin of most audiences, loses her nerve at the last curtain). And it's acutely transposed in *Sister Night* where the central character is a man 'coming out' at his first gay dance. In *Abducted A Day*, still one of Armstrong's most moving early films (and her best), she parcelled the theme to the core. Men don't appear, only their handwork: the torn-off girl shorts, and the pounding shoe factory in which the man turns out her "handmade a day" or loses her job. "I had a baby... now it's gone," she mutters, and the camera pulls away jerkily along a row of

stained terraces. Security can be bought, but only with blood and pain.

At the core of the Armstrong story is the preoccupation of all her work — the price that women must pay. All Armstrong's heroines share a vision of themselves as property, a sexual and social commodity to be bartered for what they want and need. Sybylla McLeary, Jackie McLean and Kate Sofield are traded by men as an unlisted stock exchange which assesses and values them as objects. Sybylla as a paid race to the McLearys and a prospective wife to Jackie, as a prime cut on the meatstack of the rock business, Kate Sofield as a prop to her husband's career. None of them takes issue with that fact of life. What they want, and finally seize is the right to sell themselves and keep the profits.

Armstrong seems to teach the lesson again in *High Tide*. Lilli (Judy Davis) analyses the aspects of all three Armstrong heroines — the troubadour of *My Brilliant Career*, the rock singer of *Sister Night*, the mother of *Abducted A Day*. She's a back-up singer to Lester (Fransie J. Holden), an R&B clown who owns the rock club. An end-of-season appearance in a seedy resort entitles her to one of Lilli's fits of anguish, and when Lester pulls out she's left behind, literally on the beach.

Stranded with a bashed car and no money to pay the repair bills, Lilli backs out in a conservation park on the windy point above the ocean. Ally (Claudia Karvan), a young girl who lives in the park, recognises her, but it's not until she sees the girl's grandmother, the (Jan Adele) and recognises her mothering love that the malice Ally at her daughter, abandoned years before her mother's premature death.

So far, so fine. This is the clichéisation of the sort one hoped the Australian cinema had discarded along with documentary realism, and the plot has an almost ritual predictability. Lilli will ignore her whether to reveal herself, tangle with a mother-in-law who still reveres the memory of her son, and finally face the choice to leave Ally in ignorance, or accept the ramifications — and the responsibility — of middle-aged motherhood. One's reminded uncannily of the old TV series *Roots*, where Mamie Miller and George McLean trekked into town every week in their caravans, attack a personality problem almost before they'd parked, and round away next morning to the waves and skies of those they had reconciled overnight.

Laura Jones wrote this story originally as a vehicle for a man but, inevitably, Armstrong reversed the sex. The transposition has its awkwardness. Lilli's affair with lesser Colm Freels is perfunctory, largely a series of didactic reaction shots and a final (though, for the plot, crucial) meeting with Ally. Ally's preoccupation with surfing fits oddly in the story, one preoccupation to be a detail, too brief for a theme (a difficulty due in part, says Armstrong, to

problems in finding a convincing male double). Her's private life also intrudes into what should be, almost to the exclusion of all else, the love story of Lilli and Ally. But Lilli spying with erotic fascination on her daughter as she shaves her legs, mother and daughter meeting on the beach like lovers, medals shared in the hamburger bar where the nearby presence of adolescent boys is almost a physical threat — these scenes show the scope of *High Tide* at its best.

They contrast with others where Davis and Armstrong illustrate the role of women as property. Short of the money to rescue her son, Lilli complains, facing the young miscreants, a scene played to the very tip of embarrassment but redeemed by her belated and self-deprecating acknowledgement of just how easy it is to disregard one's principles. She comes this time into a strip-tease performed for the members of the local club to earn the repair money. In the least sexual strip of many years, she looks towards the camera, posing off her costume as if it defines her identity. The men are buying nothing but cash-falls.

Great, pallid, dishevelled, Judy Davis is convincing as a piece of debris from the wreck of the atom. But it's Karvan as Ally who truly demonstrates the film. Accomplished in the war of emotions, she probes for feelings as if they're mines, maintaining a humor that would not be misplaced in an Eric Rohmer film. It's an impressive debut.

Gillian Armstrong is the most original director working in Australia today, and while *High Tide* is not the major work we had the right to expect after *Abducted A Day*, it shows her exercising her skills with un-diminished vigour. But why does a director skilled with a sense of observation concern herself with a show-wuddy-wuddy singer in a tinsel wig for whom the principle of wisdom is Bob Dylan's lyrics for 'Dirt Road'? How long before a writer adapts those classical motifs of the Woman Alone — Electra, Antigone, Iphigenia — to a director uniquely qualified to film them?

*John Baxter*

**HIGH TIDE** Directed by Gillian Armstrong. Produced: Lucy Gossage. Screenplay: Gillian Armstrong. Director of photography: Michael Hordern. Costumes: Pauline McLean. Production designer: Sally Campbell. Casting: Jan Adele. Cast: Claudia Karvan (Ally), Colm Freels (Lilli), John Cleese (Col), Wayne Tippins (Freely), Frances J. Holden (Lester). Production company: AOL. Production/Distribution: Foton. 90mm 100 minutes. Australia. 1987.

## • VINCENT

More than any other artist, Vincent van Gogh is the archetypal reprobate. His tragic life and eventual suicide have established him as the very model of the tormented artist working at the fringes of society. It therefore comes as no surprise that Paul Cox should choose to make a documentary on that artist, given Cox's apparent reverence for a

(artists) suffering and high-art values. Even the emphasis on van Gogh's death as the ride in a sure sign that suffering and death are key issues here. It's the old cliché that to be truly creative (and characteristically to possess 'genius') one must go beyond the tolerance of bourgeois society to the very limits of existence. Only in this way can one's art be 'authentic'.

Given this scenario, it is surprising that Cox has taken such a passive method to tell this story. He has used no narration other than the text of the letters that van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo, who supported the artist throughout his life. One gets the feeling that this method was chosen to allow the artist to 'speak for himself' without the external intervention of the filmmaker. Both apparent objectivity come as a welcome change from Cox, who might have lured us with the load of overblown hysteria he gave us in *My Fair Wife* instead, we are presented with images of Dutch and French landscapes as English actor John Hurt reads van Gogh's letters describing his surroundings. The touch of the film could be mistaken for a languid, bloodless documentary, were it not for flashes of Cox's by now familiar Super 8 footage — here mainly as floating images of the flowers

that fascinated van Gogh in his later life.

This characterises the early parts of the film. Then a curious thing happens as the letters come to discuss van Gogh's social and political environment, rather than just the physical surroundings, we are shown reconstructions of various scenes, from a tableaux vivant of 'The Potato Eaters' to a French bar setting, all shot from van Gogh's subjective point of view. (Here Cox really puts himself into van Gogh's shoes: the camera becomes the artist — darting this way and that, looking through windows, approaching prostitutes.) To my mind, these scenes fit uneasily with the rest of the film, and one wonders why Cox felt them necessary. It's as though he felt that the film lacked the drama needed to sustain it, or was merely too dry. Indeed, they break of bad BBC drama for the cosy man-cave-type found in every Jack the Ripper channel, especially the hideously simulative one of van Gogh's muscles where the camera flies up towards the sky and then staggers off up a country lane.

Most might have been saved by the strength of the letters, their apparent clarity before the extreme difficulty with which van Gogh experienced the world. It is frustrating that (presumably because the letters did not describe

them) several key issues of van Gogh's life are left unexplained. Because van Gogh spent much of his time photographing about the world, we are not given much material about his personal affairs, particularly his friendships with Gauguin and Pissarro. This suggests that the viewer should know something of the details of van Gogh's life before seeing the film — and yet in that case, the film is probably not interesting enough to recommend. Cox's visual sense is not sufficiently developed adequately to complement the strength of the letters. Thus we see rather unsparked shots of the French countryside at Arles, and indeed the paintings themselves. Cox could not resist the slow zoom up to van Gogh's eyes (ah yes, the eye of the artist) in the many self-portraits.

The overall impression I have is that Cox lacked the good idea to make the project really worthwhile. While the film may serve as a fair introduction to the artist and his work, the blandness of its execution makes it an aesthetically unconvincing experience.

*Richard Brown*

**VAN GOGH — THE LIFE AND DEATH OF VINCENT VAN GOGH** (1985) Directed by Paul Cox. Producers: Tony Lewellen-Jones and David Director of photography: Paul Cox. Production designer: Peter Bell. Propaganda company. Running time: 96 mins. Rating: 15. Now showing. £10. 90 minutes. Available: VHS.



MY FURTHER HALFWAY HOME: Van Gogh and his brother Theo

We suspect that John Carpenter's *They Live* was the first cult movie to bring explicitly to light rock stars and death. There's a gold mine in the idea of course, if the genre can be sustained deeply and widely enough. Eddie Money has been done, John Lennon (1978, Sid, *New Richester Valves*, The Big Bopper must be next (JULIET, our Ed Teller is a great title). Think of it: Johnny Ace, Sam Cooke, Eddie Cochran, Franklin Lymon — and, for the ultimate, *The End*, *Rockin' Lett Yo Los*, *Crank Landing*, *Ring a Gong*, *Point A Black*, *Shutaway To Heaven*, *Coldens And Strange* and *If I Should Be Tonight* (a small price for the first correct list of performances to reach us at *Concourse Poppy*).

*La Bamba* is more than this, of course, but death is written all over the epithet of Lou Diamond Phillips, who plays Rikkid. He is thin and taut, and even at rest his body seems to twitch. It is hard to imagine anyone physically further removed from Valens, who looked out like a refrigerator. The film opens with a dream of two planes crashing into one another, evoking their deaths: one a schoolboy of playing children, and the dream is repeated more than once. Rikkid's half-brother Bob (Erik Morales) is a little dazed in black, and all the rock 'n' roll greats Valens meets are dead men today.

For all that, *La Bamba* is not nihilistic (as *Blitz*, for example, is). We suspect that the film's greatest project is the virtual annihilation of death, which may be one reason that *La Bamba*, traditionally a song sung at weddings, moves as well as it does. It is the song, rather than the

singer, which becomes and identifies this film.

'La Bamba', as you know it in this film or as Ritchie Valens sang it in 1959, is a key event in the formation of American popular culture. Not only is it a dynamic song (the basis of the *Easy Rider* 'Fried And Sour', covered by Tom Petty who in 1983, and Russell Springfield's 'The Letter'), it is a dynamite rock 'n' roll song song in Spanish. The film goes out of its way to tell us that Valens did not speak Spanish (mentioning the usual rock excuse: 'I did not learn it'), and to insist 'La Bamba' does have a popular rhythm which is

L A B

constructed in a kind of a tangent to the usual rock 'n' roll lineage mythos which also permeates the film (high school, young love, an irresistible urge to make music, the bandits and so on).

Permit us to elucidate. The film gives Rikkid that unusual half-brother we already mentioned, a character who is remarkably absent in most accounts of Valens life (this does not mean that Valens did not have a half-brother, Bob, only that earlier accounts are implying one kind of hero and that *La Bamba* is implying another). Bob is a small clean rock (he runs weirdly, a wasted wasted (possibly with some driving ability), and a decent,

## • NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 3: DREAM WARRIORS

Wes is back and so is Nancy and her dad, and of course Freddy's still around, and so the third installment of the adventures of *The Nightmare On Elm Street* looks to something of a reunion. The first three installments have different roles. Wes Craven, director of the extraordinary original, is more in the background this time as author of the story, one of the own screenwriters and co-executive producer; the first child resident of the most haunted house in the street, Nancy Thompson, has blossomed into a psychiatrist specializing in chronic disorders; John Thompson has been up his hands and raised out of town; and Freddy Krueger is still Freddy Krueger, though even with his changes still in existence. The director's job goes to novice Chuck Russell, whose screenwriting credits on that wonderful little movie *Desperadoes* tell us that he knows a thing or two about what happens when we close our eyes.

The task of the sequel is to negotiate a relationship between the past and the future — to create a space which, while consistent with the general character of

the original, projects them into a completely new set of circumstances. The masters of *Streetcar* decided to bypass the interesting, if less dramatic and complex, first sequel, *Freud's Retreat*, in which Creston had no involvement. They cleverly invent a prequel for Elia Kazan: — a birth for Freddi — introduce many new characters, and fully explore the potential interests in the sequel. All of this makes *A Night in the Old Street* one of the best follow-ups as well as a film which stands on its own.

The third film makes more explicit — or, perhaps more accurately, triggers — many of the themes of the first. This strategy opens up greater drawing and comic possibilities but also risks making the events seem really ridiculous. The film needs the fine line between these two and invariably produces elements of both.

The scenario begins thus: at a some years after the "unmasking" events of Elm Street and they have been created from collective memory, when a disturbing trend begins to emerge — strange deaths. A group of seven teens ("the last four of Elm Street") who have assumed that tragic solution to their problems are being housed at Woods Hills Psychiatric Hospital. Known

(Priscilla Argante, Rosanna's sister) is the first of them to be introduced. She is building a paper mache house, which happens to be an exact replica of Nancy's old abode, where all the trouble started. When Kristen's mother arrives home from a date she finds that her daughter has (apparently inadvertently) skinned her wrist. Kristen is admitted to the hospital, and placed under the care of Dr. Ned Goldenson (Craig Wasson), a concerned but perplexed psychiatrist who has an empathy with the kill not shared by the more sternly doctrinaire Dr. Elizabeth Stancz (Priscilla Faust).

Dr Nancy Thompson (Heather Langenkamp) realises that young Kristen possesses the ability to draw the others into her dreams, and it is obvious to Nancy (because she's been through it all) that there is a connection between the protagonist's fear of falling asleep and drowning and their suicide attempt. Freddy Krueger (Robert Englund) has quite literally raised his ugly head again. The task is, with hypnosis and a new experimental dream-suppressant drug, to fight him in their dreams, on the old home ground she and Freddy share.

As a term paper, *Down Warren* makes some credit, of extremely fancy work about horses reared and the

with angry inquiry (such as the real *Wise Men* never had). It is an instant of *Meekness*, a moment of, yes, appropriation, a signal of status and influence. My think the defiance part is pretty important, because it is too easy to just sit there, going "uh-huh, uh-huh" and "uh-uh" when that is not it at all. This is assertion, control — not submission, not power under.

One measures the distance of Bess  
the chit by the way in which they act  
conventionally. Rock Blimp tries to make  
much of more subtleties the professor  
and the critics are repelled with wary  
distrustfulness. In Bessie is not much  
concerned with the causes. It makes  
Hedda's *Hamlet* Valley  
doubtless into his audience, his  
friends into his fans. The consciousness of  
the film is modest, local - and possible,  
and in the end, what might have been a  
romantic "I" vision of a catastrophe and  
all the circumstances that lie in evidence  
is completely. This is the road we can

THE BOSTONIAN SOCIETY



HAVE SOUTHERN WILL TRAVEL  
With General Potts

4 capacities of the kids to act out their fascinations. Highly fanciful endings await some of these fresh-faced romances: Jennifer (Penelope Burkett), who wants more than anything else in the world to be on TV, gets her wish rather sooner than expected when Freddy turns up as an uninvited guest on 'The Rock Concert Show' (the second guest is Zsa Zsa Gabor) and (thanks of Pinheados) helps the TV set to move across and ram the young girl's head into a jeep (Rodney Eastman), who, fearing one of the horrors, is plunged into a seemingly 'real' sodality before we learn that Freddy is the culprit. Unintentionally, the kids go to extraordinary lengths to stay awake: When they stick together, with Mandy's help, they are not too hazy about the updating sequence of most conventional teen fictions.

In *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, the teenagers who get these nightmares are the ones who succumb to the pleasures of the flesh or excessive amounts of TV and heavy metal. Although Nancy is pursued through much of the film, her Christian faith and purity are implicitly what saved her. But it is the parents who are directly responsible for their children's sins: marriage break-ups, taking on new lovers, neglect, alcoholism and lack of understanding are the root causes, the disruptions of the nuclear family ideal.

The guilt of the older generation is emphasized much more strongly in *Death Rites*, as is the real origin of the lost's problems. Everything is that much wittier. Freddy's story, the Christianity and the overhanging horne of (the red pulpit, the red oral) obsession, unconvincable male sterility? You better believe that no one his ever looked more like a walking, writhing penis in man's clothing than Freddy. In one of Kristen's nightmares, he actually turns into an enormous tit, his head boudoir heimlich on the end of it.

The final magnificent battle takes place on two floors in the car wrecks where Freddy's bases are buried and in the labyrinthine basement of Nancy's old house. Freddy can hardly be everywhere at once, and so the distance between these two locations causes few problems. The cutting between the two is very impressive, as are some of the effects in the basement — in particular a hall of mirrors, any of which Freddy can appear in to grab one of the kids (no, not in *Conan's* wrists). <sup>1</sup>

In modern horror films any set of expectations concerning consistency of narrative development can be overturned, especially in the service of producing another sequel, and that film is no exception. Perhaps it is simply that good cannot be allowed to triumph over evil. Doubting between Nancy and Freckle introduces a degree of ambivalence to the otherwise blasphemous differentiation. The appearance of the little girls skipping and singing their innocent rhymes, with extremely sinister intentions, becomes at a counterpoint to the fear produced by the most deadly male presence.

George Washington begins with a quip from Poe about the relationship between sleep and death and proves equal to the task of making it applicable rather than simply pretentious. It is unfair to compare it with the beautifully subtended original, but this is not necessary as the film's balance of horror, pathos and humour makes its excesses perfectly acceptable.

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GARDENS OF STONE

Filmmaker Coppola has not yet returned from the journey into America's recent past that he began with *Peggy Sue Got Married*. However, unlike the round trip that Peggy Sue made in a year that sharply defined her presence, Coppola's most recent film, *Conrack* or *Snow*, offers no such perspective, nor does it measure itself with easily identifiable characters. In its depiction of another time and place, *Conrack* is static, its characters, situations and ethics obscured by a palor that is somewhat regressive, both in terms of Coppola's career and the more general content of *Movies About Ourselves*.

Appropriately, *Carries On* is framed and bounded by the spectre of death. Most of the film's action takes place at Arlington Memorial Cemetery where the members of the Old Guard, the tiny soldiers who maintain the army's profile on the honor barge, graciously and unostentatiously lay to rest the victims of the war in Vietnam. Amidst an observational fascination with the rituals of army life, the film evokes the fact of the building, stoicistic recruit Jackie Willow (D.B. Sweeney), languishing and sinking to the cold earth of Arlington, slowly and reluctantly surrendering to its foregone conclusion.

"There's no doubt that *Godzilla* Of These at least proposes a refreshing angle on the American experience of *Visions*. With the exception of two brief inserts of archival footage, the film is unlike most other war films in that it takes place almost entirely on the home front. In *Godzilla's* hands, it might have been a mushy romantic film about the growing of an era, the loss of innocence, the markings of maturation, the wondrousness of age and the wane impermanence of youth. *Visions* painlessly, however, *Godzilla* Of These doesn't seem to do much outside of its own narrow and singular confines.

The film's primary relationship is between Willow and Sergeant Child Hazard (James Caan), a disconcerted vet and old war buddy of Willow's father. Willow looks to Hazard for paternal guidance, especially after his own father dies during the course of the film. To neatly balance the equation – father and son, teacher and pupil – Hazard's son is in the custody of his ex-wife. Distractedly aware of the 'right stuff', Willow quickly earns his stripes and a place in the grown-up's table with Hazard and a black Semper Fi Major Bloody Noland (James Earl Jones). Despite the comradeship and respect that the men develop, there remains a basic rift between Willow's unrelenting wish to serve his country (an anti-war intervention could be Oliver North's war, dream) and Hazard's wonderful prediction of the Vietnam War, "It's not even a war. There's nothing to win and my way to win it," he says. Plainly acknowledging the issue of responsibility for the soldier's death, the film surrenders to the same sense of ambivalence evident



PRIVACY BRIEFING: MARY HEALY: *Patricia Agius's* recent claims against the

### What is known here

The film's treatment of the widow, supposedly anti-war journalist Susanna Devlin (Angela Maoz), with whom Haesel has a relationship, is downplayed cynical. She is a token participant in the peace movement and the film primarily regards her to wait in the wings as Haesel's supportive partner, preferring to not allow their differences to hinder their relationship.

Nothing is allowed to mar the sympathetic portrayal of the military. Differences of opinion and challenges to the order — such as the wish of *Wiglow's* steward — that the *Wiglow's* steward (Mary Stuart Masterson) to be free of the vantage of military life — are overruled, or rather, sub-tapped, by having the character swallow the bait and finally endure the consequences.

With a film as propagandistic as this, it doesn't help us knowing that it was made with the full co-operation of the US Army, or that Nicholas Proffer, upon whom novel the screenplay is based, may have wrote the book, "because I didn't like the usage of the uncoordinated effort". Again from the suspicion raised by such claims, in particular are the contrived storylines and implausible characterizations that are used to gloss over a barely-concealed, self-aggrandizing falsehood.

Paul E. Johnson

## • EXTREME PREJUDICE

Western-producer-director Walter Hill is one of the few rare exceptions in his generation of filmmaking peers to be able to make great exciting genre movies. His sense of the different generic conventions and visualities that form the classic Hollywood cinema in ancestry, he can construct and tell a genre movie with the clearest whitedove economy of a Sergio Leone. Hill's kinetic expressiveness and strong storytelling skills are clearly articulated in his latest effort *Extreme Prejudice*. This finely choreographed action thriller embodies a solid grasp of formula filmmaking: it's a movie that knows what it's about, where it's coming from, and where it's going.

Hill's characteristic manner as a grim Marauder is evident in frame after frame of this creakingly paced and doggedly moving After the initial appearance of the Cherry Head hoodlum Jack Benten, a Texas Ranger (performed by the brilliant Nacho Novak) and Sheriff Mack Rawson (Sam Kydd), we realize



PROFOUNDLY BENEFIT Many people join Party with good will but they cannot be properly educated (see opportunity).

that Hall has closely considered two distinct genres: the *raids* across the frontier and the *Western* (although the latter appears in a much milder form). *Extreme Frontier* exhibits certain traits of a particular sub-genre of the *Western*, namely, those movies which present the cowboy in a manner which is rapidly becoming obsolete and which herald the details of the genre itself. Two movies of this kind are *King Kong's* *The Valley of Gobi* (1935) and David Miller's undervalued *Lonely As The Arms* (1936). *Frontier* looks and behaves like a *Westerner*. He is rarely seen without his white hat and his silver revolver. Make no mistake about it — *Frontier* means *frontier*. This hero is one courageous, upright, unscrupulous cowboy living in a sparsely settled frontier dominated by rampant crime. Drug-running and daily violence are the two essentials of *Frontier's* menacing rural habitat (the *Texas-Mexico border*). Hall makes care to make a list of the ubiquitous inhabitants of the place. In this regard he has not lost sight of the importance of landscape in the *Western*. And what a place it is. Immediately, Raymond Bellof's description of *Texas* as a "lost, crazy place" comes to mind.

We are often placed in dusty, desolate desert locales marked by the occasional broken-down farm, or right smack in the middle of a smoke-filled town full of caucasian pale faces, where dirt-poor American farmers and Mexican drifters blues away in a constant howl of good times and often drug misery. Whether you are right out in the scrub or back on the main street of Bentonia's hometown of Blythe, it doesn't matter — it's all redneck country, ready to

explosive. Hill delivers the goods on this score in several stunning long shot scenes of explosions, with the frame jam packed with the mobile debris of the explosion like a Justice Pollack caravane, or in a manner reminiscent of *Salvador* first, but in much quicker tempo.

Bernstein, who possesses the moral certainties and single-mindedness of Randolph Scott as a Westerner, is haunted by the uncomfortable truth that his girlfriend, Serra (Mara Conchita Alonso), was once the mistress of the leading drug criminal in the area, Cash Bailey (Powers Boothe). To make things more complicated for the Texas Ranger, both he and the psychopath Cash were once childhood friends. Bernstein wishes to reform Cash, but it's hopeless. The intensity of antagonism between the protagonist and antagonist has been cleverly modulated. In a *News* interview with Hill nearly a decade ago, the filmmaker talked about how the *man or woman* genre relates to the essential convention of creating antagonistic tension between the main character and the antagonist and how the filmmaker can make the spectator into his or her accomplice. *Lawless Justice* is a fine instance of this generic feature.

Hill pays homage to Peckingshah's realistic vision in many thrilling and atmospheric scenes. What we can take in the movie are many important themes and lyrical connections to the work of Peckingshah and Bengali. All three filmmakers are related in terms of their careers as well as a more fundamental sense of being important figures in genre cinema. Peckingshah worked for Bengali as a screenwriter (he also had a small role in a

• Boyd's *Journal Of The Body Snatchers*) and Hill adapted Jon Thompson's crime novel *The Gateway For Peckham Rye*

Earlier on in the movie Pearson, who is Bentzen's father, narrates a figure, which is totally worthy of Will Rogers, about how the right way is the hardest way and being evil is so easy. Bentzen is a survivor because of his artful amorality. Temptation is everywhere but like a good cowboy he is, Bentzen will not give in. His America is a hellish mix of absolute monarchic ethics and indifference to the traditional values of the country's Founding Fathers. Even the scorpions don't feel well in such a place. We see Bailey, in a big, tight close up, clutch a scorpion in the palm of his hand after playing with it like a cat with a caught mouse. Presumably the scorpion we see is one of the several that feature at the beginning of *The Wild Bunch*, struggling against infernal seas and observed by a number of children. Hill, like Peckinpah, explores the idea of evil as an expression of entrapment. The non-dictatic sexual energy of Hill's movie suggests that evil is practically mainstream.

*Extreme Prejudice* is an important, vibrant genre movie, not only for its allusions to the many broader concerns of the Hollywood genres of the Western and the action thriller and the film maker's personal respect for Segel and Pickapeck as two major directors of action movies. There are also astounding moments that show Hilt's elastic ability to narrate the familiar narrative and visual conventions of classical genre cinema.

If you are a fan of Hul's cinema then this is for you. If you are not familiar with his clever concatenations on genre films then this is a good starting point. If you like action movies then this is also for you. Get your drift.

John Chapman

• PIM SUM

Wayne Wang's *Dim Sum* begins with a series of shots that are not especially about the film's characters. Among them, a curtain blowing gently with the wind, a hand resting in a stage, a longanrum, a dining table, and finally, a car driving along a road trip. The film ends on a variation of the same series of shots. The series has been expanded, in key punctuating moments throughout the story, to include a backyard, a

collection of assorted shapes at the bottom of a cavity of sand, and a few

There is a further method for "read-ing" these kinds of images, summarizing them as the little "green room", the moment of epiphany, which informs a human story. Here is the story in question: Geraldine (Laurence Cheung) lives with her mother, Mrs. Tam (Kun Chow). She is "the best Chinese daughter" to look after her mother in this way, according to her neighbour, Auntie Mary (Lie Cheng). However, Geraldine is torn inside, in a few directions — should she marry her boyfriend, Richard (John Nishida), in order just to please her mother? Should she move out and live independently like her friend, Julia (Coco Miao)? Or should she stay looking after her mother — particularly as Mrs. Tam is convinced that, at the age of 60, according to a fortune teller's prediction, she is about to die?

Classic family problem: the conflict between duty towards son's parents, and the desire to live one's own life. Classic reversibility problem: how to be happy. What better agenda of 'universal' for a humanist film? The Western critic leapt from the latent Woody Allen, who also enjoys a taste for the films of Yasujiro Ozu, knows well what to do with all these empty 'pillow sheets' of curtains and doors and dining tables in *Das Boot*: he or she sets there the signs of time passing, and is reassured that life goes on, that all wounds will be healed, that everything comes out in the eternal, *unendlich*.

Wong is fully aware of the subtleties of sentimental Western humanism, and he gives them a film they are sure to love. But that is only one face of *San Sien*. In a film as radically "Chinese-American" — neither entirely one nor the other, and definitely not the two wedded into the same species — you might also expect the emergence of another, more hidden face which can only be seen in a different light. One thing is for certain: whatever face you can see, it's an exceptionally fine film.

Don Sun both represents, and plays out on its own surface, a series of differences between Chinese and American 'topics'. In a romance which is similar in feel and attitudes to some of the great American comedies of the 1930s (by Sturges, McCay or Capra), Wang at one point lays down a rigid opposition between two poles of absolute emotional extremes. Rather, he carefully grades the markers of 'in-betweenness'; some Chinese are more American than others. Some of the characters react according to the American way of life (and succeed or fail in their reaction), others aspire to assimilation (and likewise succeed or fail).

The film makes no claim and does no disservice to the attempt to precisely understand the play and balance of cultural forces in any given society, situation, gesture, affectiveness. Mrs Turner might in this sense be the most "naturally" Chinese of all the family members; but we were later told that "she's Chinese when she wants to be" or, indeed, "she's Chinese when she wants to be".



Debi Sujit, Ganesha (Lakshmi Chaw) and Uncle Tari (Rajesh Wadhwani) celebrate his birthday.

what she wants", which is a rather different game. Auntie Mary is fully converted to *Dynasty*, but this, as the captain, is because it is "just like the Chinese soap opera — sex, love and money". Uncle Tom (played by the brilliant comic actor Victor Wong) adores American culture and American women alike, but because the loss of the most exquisite Chinese recipes traditionally handed down from mother to daughter. And even the most entirely Westernised teenagers can get heatedly into a game of Mah Jong.

Wong's special interest in the Chinese-American comparison centres on the question of innocence and their expression — the innocence or 'little bit of heart' of the title. The Americanisation of family life, as witnessed by Uncle Tom from his exotic childhood memory of Cigars' *Fee Can't Take It With You*, is that of "people laughing and hugging each other and loving each other".<sup>12</sup> The Chinese are portrayed by Wong as, by definition, less open. Mrs Tan provides the unemotional extreme of an inscrutability suggesting perhaps of deep self-preoccupation. But here too the film yields its most telling moments from the single shifts and changes along a sliding scale of emotional expressiveness, such as the scene in which Jaka slowly lets go her grief over her mother's death.

The Westernised side of *Das Sun* itself is this 'human drama' aspect. It is a drama of conflicting cultural and emotional tendencies which resolve and bleed into each other in the course of time. Lovers saw, that is, in which flowers and people alike grow and die, a scene poetically enacted out on a calendar of family rituals great and small. These rituals constitute a 'transcultural' world of decisions that must be made by each and every responsible individual and the 'vassal-sons' that follow from indecision or bad decisions — the terms of endurance of everyday life.

Wong has the genre of "everyday life" worked out to a fault. *Das Sun* is entirely comprised of details: preparing and taking food, combing hair, brushing teeth, putting on reading glasses, sweeping out the back porch, hanging clothes on the line, visiting one's neighbour at a regular time each day. This face of *Das Sun* has an appropriate musical score featuring a zither and a xylophone which shimmer phrases until the final credits when they play in harmony.

The other *Das Sun* is harder to describe. It doesn't take place in linear time, or in the line of space that can be used up in a staircase. It is enigma of perpetual motion, and barely audible above the sound of a single bird or a distant murmur of traffic. It describes a world which can on no account be made tangible with what the characters perceive, feel or think. On the contrary, it is the world which is all around but completely beyond the compass of these people whom Wong rigorously hems in for the characters of such crystalline two-

shot of the film. A world always off-focus, drawing away without the slightest tension. And frequently across too, in all these 'pillow shots' that are really a lot more than just epiphany: punctuation.

Wong's *Wings* reached the border of the world three years earlier in *One Is Mine*, and realised full well the condition of early abdication there any notion of an individual consciousness, a 'self-journey', which can, through force of will and reason, master and comprehend all things. Now a cold world by any means — in fact, it is full of surprise, laughter and whimsy — but one simply unadorned of weighty Western pattern like memory, chronology, identity, meaning. I can't give away the ending of *Das Sun*, but I can suggest that what it relates, like a bird suddenly let loose from the hand to fly, is the estimation of that other world that has been there all along. *Overdrive* learns that there are no longer any terms to be met, or decisions to be made. And in the context of what first appears as a humanly hardly dedicated to the necessary pain of family responsibility, that's a subversive message indeed.

Adrian Martin

**ONE SUN — A LITTLE BIT OF HEART** Directed by Wayne Wang. Produced by Tom Bernstein. Written by Wayne Wang. From Young American producer Jerry Liung. Special effects producer Michael Tie. Story by Wayne Wang. Story by Tom Bernstein. Cinematography by Michael Chen. Music: Scott Mathewson. Edited by Hugh Wilson. Cast: Helen Chen (Blossom Tang), Kim Chiu (Jane), Pauline Lin (Linda), Yuen Yuen Ip (Mrs. Tan), Louie O. Cheung (Uncle Wong). Distributed by John Badham's 20th Century Fox Film Corporation. Rating: R. Running time: 111 minutes. USA 1986.

## • GROUND ZERO

One problem in reviewing any film heavily reliant upon 'impense' as a strategy is how much of the plot one divulges, and therefore, to what degree the impact of the film is compromised. In the case of *Ground Zero* little would be gained by revealing all, although on first viewing there seemed to be some troublesome loose ends, questions left unanswered, holes in the plot. Not so.

My second exposure to the film not only confirmed, but amplified the feeling that this is one of the finest Australian cinematic features of the eighties.

Fair and balanced, *Ground Zero* is an accomplished thriller set in the milieu of conspiracy and intrigue of the Royal Commission into the British nuclear tests carried out in Australia during the 1950s and 60s.

The screenplay, by Mac Gregor and Jan Sardi, is fast and suspenseful, the production values high, and the direction assertive.

It is a credit to the scriptwriters that the film manages to address so many difficult and often contentious themes, such as the hidden political agendas of 'security' services operating within this country, the European establishment of Aboriginal culture and Australia's past

and future links to Western nuclear strategy, without appearing paraded or reduced to blinding heat liberalism. In fact, the focus of *Ground Zero* seems to be the relationship between 'legitimate' parades and the individual citizen's absorption of moral and political power under the guise of 'democracy' to the deceitful 'back room boys', experts in the techniques of maintaining the status quo.

The movie opens ominously, as a radioactive RAAF Lincoln bomber is unearthed near Maralinga, residue from the British nuclear experimentation 20 years earlier. In there cuts to Harvey Denton (played with restraint by Colin Firth) stop a native elder shouting a Hiroshima advertising slogan for Texaco-style kerosene. Instantly we are transported from the 'hot' colonial leftovers of the past, to our contemporary cultural hell of fire. The moment is here reinforced by a nervous exasperated British officer, Propper Gaffney (Donald Pleasence), when he is confronted by a black American soldier parroting a 'John Fasch' passenger line (presumably Narragansett): "Nothing changes, only the uniform," he warns Harvey. "Trust us on this."

Denton eventually seeks out Gaffney after he learns that the nuclear war may know something about missing classified footage he harvested father Elmer while working as an Army cameraman during the second war. The old man is full of remorse for participating in the nuclear explosion, his complicity in contaminating the blocks with radioactive fallout, and a fundamental bewilderment of trust. He is driven by a malignant vengeance and guilt, proclaiming that "You'll all burn for what we've done", but manages to help Denton and ward off his foreign guests. This enables Denton to present evidence on the last day of the Commission hearings which he believes will conclusively prove that the British were conspiring to cover up the extent of their radioactive fallout effects, especially upon the black community.

The degree of sophistication of plot and characterisation in *Ground Zero* is apparent even in the most peripheral of characters, ranging from a partially deaf film lab technician to the officious Army film archivist whose public service 'stink-watching' is brilliantly realised. Even the minor role of a ubiquitous ABC77 sport (Glenys Fawcett, rather nicely dispensed in one of the film's more overt references to Antonioni's *Alice* (1960) is rendered far more important than the cumulative screen time of less than 20 seconds would suggest.

At the scope/symbole level the filmmakers have likewise intelligently layered their text with broader associations. For example, in one context, when depicted as a TV screen logo, the shared cultural motif of two adjacent circles intersected by parallel lines connotes transference of information and communication, but when Gaffney across the spaniel in the outback dirt at ▶

the head of his Aboriginal companion's grave, it implies a curious relationship of communion between worlds along a dreamlike track.

Throughout the film there is a constant allusive backdrop of international careers affairs, predominantly conveyed by the television in Harvey's studio apartment, a captain MK's launch, footage of Benigni and Hawks meeting in Washington to reaffirm the ANZUS treaty, and ballasts commenting on the Royal Commission hearings. However, the irony of the concerned TV screen's failure to address the pertinent questions by knowing to Government 'D' moves would not be lost on public television lobbyist Mac Gudgen. In this sense, having confronted the amorphous influence of the intelligence community, it seems the last thing Harvey will do (just as Robert Redford's unafforded desire to expose at the finale of *3 Days Of The Condor*) is again rely upon the establishment: media, the bourgeoisie, and support.

Surprisingly, the film is full of such esoteric embellishments, such as the gloomy references of ASIO's Aboriginal front, counter-espionage, or the Purus striking charms of a senior official (Jack Thompson) who relates to Harvey the difficulty the organization is having in "upgrading its image".

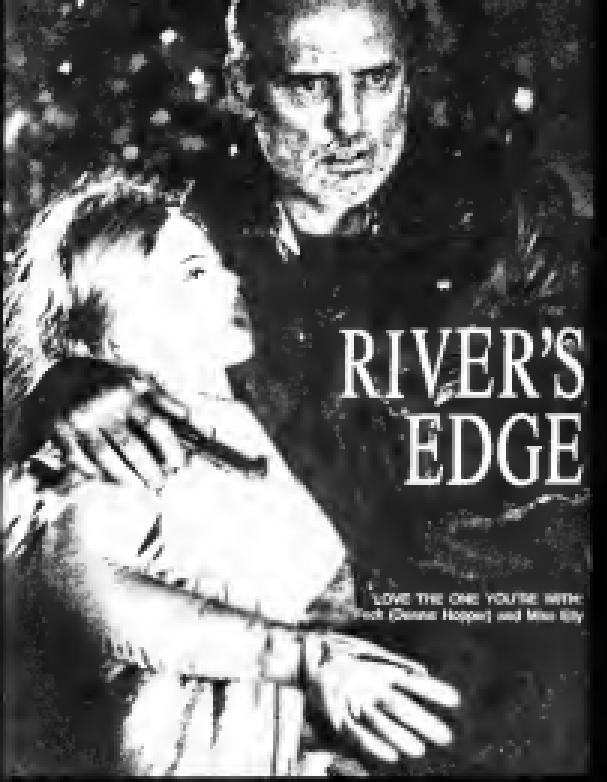
Surprisingly, this very thickness of narrative design and mise-en-scene is in no way distract from the broader implications of desire and compulsion permeating the 'high ground' of political, diplomatic and interests of national security.

Finally, in many ways *Ground Zero* seems a logical synthesis and expansion of two earlier Australian features, *The Last Wave* (1977) and *The Chant Of The Radiance* (1979), in that it blends its Aboriginal mythology (the Aboriginal 'hallowed' land tribe's dismantling) with the former film's apocalyptic monophrenopathy and the latter's depiction of hegemonic forces attempting to cover up nuclear carnage via murder and subterfuge. Not surprisingly, recognition of the *Mad Max* trilogy is also evident during the explosive collision of Harvey's thinking Holden with a military jingo, and in Gaffney's paranoid religious cult paroxysms, depicting an Australian Armageddon akin to that related by the child survivors in *Requiem For A Dream*.

The rich complexity of characters material and its associations in *Ground Zero* is matched only by the precision of execution and its attention to detail. It also clearly demonstrates that this country has the talent and ability to produce uncluttered, commercial cinema of the highest order.

Mark Broderick

OPENING JERBO. Directed by Michael Peterson. Bruce Myler, Protagonist. Michael Peterson, Sonny, Jon Seda, Matt Guglielmo. Director of photography: Steven Leder. Editor: David Parker. Production designer: Robert Trujillo. Cinematography: Peter Harvey. Design: Dennis Mazzoni. Production designer: Dennis Mazzoni. Casting: Linda Johnson. President: Production company: Ground Zero Pictures. Distributor: High Street. 165 minutes. Australia. 1997.



# RIVER'S EDGE

LOVE THE ONE YOU'RE WITH  
Dennis Hopper and Mira Furlan

Tim Robbins's *Alone's Edge* is being rightly recognized with the recent spate of neo-American Gothic fictions: *Blue Eyes*, *UFOs*, *Reeling*, *Striptease*, *Over The Edge*, *Witches And Wizards*, *Requiem*, *Requiem*, *Blind Angels*, *Something Wild* — the likes. J. Hollywood claims have "the force of a cultural upsurge".<sup>1</sup> Whatever. These films appear to be sustained by the large forces of commercial film narrative artifice, but at more specific levels their excesses keep sloshing over, spilling toward *Striptease*, *Blue Paradise*, *True Stories*, *Shameless*, *Magical*. They make unusual demands on the filmmakers, who must organize complex shifts of tone and narration; and as viewers, who must be particularly attentive to detail, reference, and precisely measured differences from expected needs.

How any of these films get made — let alone as many all at once — is remarkable. Here's how this one came about.

Four years ago, Neal Jimenez was a student in a screenwriting class at UCLA. He wrote *River's Edge* as an assignment. "He said no he get a C+ for it," Jimenez says, "and it went on to win a student prize, which got it distributed among agents."<sup>2</sup> There it held in a long holding pattern.

Meanwhile, Tim Robbins was in Marfa, Texas making *Splinter*, a National Film-Style house story which was fun to make and wasn't another

Robbins is an unusual figure figure in the American cinema. I met him when he was among the first year's intake at the American Film Institute's film school training centre (fellow students included Paul Schrader, Terry Malick, Tom Rickman, Caleb Deschanel, Jeremy Paul Kagan). The son of blacklisted screenwriter Ian Hunter, Tim had already made shorts and a feature, *Requiem's Daughters*, in American public TV; he had also become a favorite and like Marlon.

After that, he put his hand down and stayed, pushing original projects, script doctoring, publishing a mystery novel. He wrote Jonathan Kaplan's *Over The Edge* (1985), a story of alienated kids in a dying hunting estate, adapting his special interest in youth films. He adapted and directed the first of the S.E. Hinton books to hit the screen, *Tar* (1984), which was generally considered by Coppola's *Elmetto*, *Shout! A Kid And The City*. A lot of work on *Wiseblood* (Marlon); somewhat later, *Splinter*.

His next role is in *Bluebeard* and *Malice*, in the Marlon-ism and of American cinema (Lang, Mizrahi, Pomeroy, Walsh, Fuller, Deau — who also made a film called *The River's Edge* — Rick, Banks, Hitchcock, Ford, Tarkovsky, Cormac), and the French cinema (Marie through to *New Wave*, *It's an expert on hand-coded novels* (currently working with James Cagney

on a career adaptation of *Dancing Bear*, the Beach Boys, and whatever music kids are listening to at the moment. Nicely and quickly, he parades the projects he likes either than the generated box clamps.

"After *Sydney*, I was settling in for another three-year business period when Midge Suskind and Sarah Polley offered me *River's Edge*. They're very good independent producers — they did *Independence Day*. I didn't change a word of the script, and I had to keep Jameson from changing lines."

The production deal was set with Homeland, "a couple of British wusses, they like to make films about the dark side of American life, like *Planes, The Fireman*, and *The Falcon and the Snowman*". They also like to make cheap *River's Edge* comes in for \$184.7 million on a \$100k vehicle in sleepy LA suburb Topanga, with three days of over shooting in Sacramento, Hunter's imagination editor Howard Smith on the dials.

In the US, *River's Edge* got a big city arthouse opening, showed enough legs for a wider break, and after that held in arthouse: 150 prints working, great reviews from the writers who counted. As of July 15 weeks in release, \$184 million gross.

In a reasonable society, that should be enough to get you into the theatre, and to check out *River's Edge* and the rest of the video shop; but at today's prices . . .

*River's Edge* starts just after an overacted, overcritical, backhanded high school kid, John (Daniel Radcliffe), is struggling his girlfriend. He sits by the river, by his naked corpse. His weird death attracts the attention of a previous grade school wheelchairer, Tim (Joshua Malina), who has just thrown a female doll corpse into the river. The news spreads through the high school where an overactive pharmaceutical major, Layne (Colin Hanks), expresses John's dilemma: nobody tells. It's quite a school the clever teacher maintains an about how he stopped a war and brought a nation to its knees in 1945, leaving the lack of activism among today's students, and finally decides they should all have jobs and kill themselves a day.

Responses to John's act of passion vary, of course, and finally Tim's older brother, Matt (Kieran Culkin), decides

that the responsible thing to do is advise the police, which he does. So Layne stalks John at Dennis Hopper's suburban pinkie house. Hopper hasn't been out of the house in five years. He has an artificial leg and tells a good story about it. He hasn't got sleep due to kids and answers every knock at the door with, "The answer is in the next!" He is never without his disassembled revolver, which, he tells us often, he finds his women with because he loves her . . . He lives with a old woman doll, Miss Elly, he treats her with great courtesy and respects whom to do as Hunter says they had trouble casting this role as other older would teach it because of the Miss Elly character.

Small differences begin to split this small universe (for example, Tim is another 12-year-old kid: "It's my fucking brother. Go get your manchaka and your Dad's car, I know where we can get a girl.") They die and he dies. The film moves to a balanced conclusion of moral and narrative symmetry.

Summary is inadequate for the film is not simple. You will be told that it is a black comedy and a nightmare vision of life in midtown America. True. Hunter's style is not derivative, like *The Blue Room*; *River's Edge* has some lyric, Chaucerian passages, but most of the film, like Chalked, like Lang, is cool and distanced. Characters and events are not presented to be likable, but to be thought about. It has its overreliance, but a fundamental overreliance and compensated of illegible images has health issues.

Hunter uses this distance to contain a variety of character lines and acting styles threatening to spill off into six different films. Hunter places the film on the shifting class issues between John and the Hopper character, a development of social struggle successfully to assemble an incomplete do-it-yourself spiritual universe. *Kit*. R.J. Thompson

1994 R 100 min. Written by Tim Hunter. Produced by Dennis Hopper. Directed by Tim Hunter. Executive producer John Daly. Casting: Dennis Hopper. Art director: Dennis Hopper. Production designer: John McElroy. Hair: Michael Scott. Wardrobe: Karen Conner. Costumes: Karen Hopper (Paul), Colleen Kinson (Layne), Kieran Hanks (Matt), Anna Sage Linton (Layne), Jordan Ross (John). Director of photography: Dennis Hopper. Music: David Rabe (score). Production company: Larkspur Pictures. Distributor: High Noon (101 Minors USA 1995).

THE KIDS AND ALL RIGHT: Matt (Kieran Culkin) and Layne (Colin Hanks) look



GO WEST: YOUNG WOMAN Sigrid Thornton wears the Akubra

## \* SLATE, WYN AND ME

Slater and Wynn are the Jackson brothers — in the tradition of, but without the popular mystique of, the Kelllys.

Slater (harmlessly played by Marion Suckie) is a Vietnam vet with danger on his mind and a chip on his shoulder. Equipped with a pair of mean-stance sunglasses, Slater is a bit of a rough diamond in sleepy hollow Moonbury. This isn't smalltown America, but it might as well be — the boys still live at the local dance and the girls still around them in smart frocks. Only the fairy lights lend it Aussie mystique.

Wyn (Simon Burke) is the typical younger brother: thicker at flesh and mind, he envies Slater, who has seen action he could only dream of and who knows how to chase a woman. Slater suggests rapping off the local bank. Wyn's in like Wyn.

The holdup is interrupted by the local Inspector Ford. Wyn panics, his gun goes off and the third wheel turns fugitive. But there's a woman, Marlene (Sigrid Thornton), and so the boys haul him up, chuck her in the boot and head north.

Thornton seems endlessly charmed to play the well-heeled horse-riding type who charms herself by virtue of her fiery independence (think of Judy Davis'). As Marlene, she competently moves from prudish school-marm to whip-smacking co-ed as the boys promote her from looked-around to seductress. Just as well she looks a treat in jeans-and-knee cowboy shirts and slouch hats.

Swishing Wynn's fair red Valenit for the all-time leggy air — a blue-listed convertible which is handily winking in the outback to be stolen — the trio trek along red dirt tracks, beside endless rivers and through vicious canyons. This allows for lots of gorgeous nature and unending looks over flickering camp fires. As Marlene becomes increasingly more beautiful and raunchy, there is cause for the only tension apparent in the film.





DON'T SHOOT DARLING! Scene from Pauline McConagh's *The Dressmaker* (1988)

## DON'T SHOOT DARLING! Women's Independent Filmmaking In Australia

Edited by Annette Bloch, Barbara Creed & Freda Pfeiffer (Cinemhouse Publications, 1987, ISBN 0 86438 084 4 \$29.95 rrp)

One of the most interesting and impressive aspects of 'Don't Shoot Darling!' is its lack of nostalgia and tendentious celebration. It is an obvious term of endearment, clear-eyed and critical. It does recognise achievement where it occurred, but very much in the style of one who has grown to perceive distance, and can see clearly the pleasures and pains of both the past and the present. (This is not to suggest that the book has just one view of history or even a single voice.)

It is, as the editors describe it, not a history of women's independent filmmaking in Australia, but rather a "collection of documentaries and discussions". It consists of a number of sections that range from analysis of government policy towards women's filmmaking, to discussions of various women's movements, to personal recollections by women involved in film and television, to what is called "critical analysis". These sections embrace a wide variety of styles, standards and personal perspectives.

But overall, the guiding hand of the editors is very evident. As well as raising what are among the best contributions in the book, they supply an introduction to each section, thereby implying an analytical edit that the material is to follow, recent events pointing to reported patterns, emphasising certain aspects, making assessments. This does not distract or break rending, rather it performs the necessary task of binding together (but not fully satisfying) the great range of material in the book which, without this guiding structure, might fly away in as many different directions as it would lose what it takes to be its form and substance, namely to provide the means by which past directions can be assessed and critiqued and future directions charted.

The editors stress that their book is not intended to be a history, but a set of documentaries and discussions. And at first sight, the choice of material is a surprise: it has no original documents, no contemporary material. The only article that is reproduced from another source is Barbara Creed's useful survey of domestic film theory of the previous and earlier, a piece which more than any of the others serves a purely back-grounding function. Otherwise, all the material has been written especially for the book, though

clearly over a long period, due to its understandably lengthy production time. This is entirely justified by its substantial and comprehensive nature. It means that the book is bound to be deeply multi-layered, and it required courage on the part of these authors, who took it on themselves to give a history of institutions and events that so many were involved in and that were inevitably full of contentious localities.

At times this provides analysis that seems almost perennially controversial — for example, in Sue Scott's somewhat eccentric assessment of *Filmmakers*. She maintains that "a sense of separate identity and political autonomy for women filmmakers in the context of *Filmmakers* as a lobby of film-makers is rarely apparent" (p.350), women a little harsh in the light of the extensive coverage given to women's filmmaking over the years. And the low level, as she sees it, of feminist criticism in the pages of *Filmmakers* could as well be attributed to the situation of increasing education, public criticism of any area of Australian concern as to the independence of *Filmmakers* and the Sydney Film-makers' Congressmen in Scott's claims. This point is made in Gaiutra Stewart's article on the media coverage of the *Adelaide Filmfests* session, in which she quotes Margaret Morris's account of the expansion of *Feminist* squatting between the pressures to defend women's filmmaking publicly, and the pressure to be leniently critical about it, a position which can lead to doing nothing adequately.

The final part of the book, the sections on *Women*, and the *Arts, Feminist Activism and Trauma and Affirmative Action* provides a rich and detailed set of accounts of the circumstances that led to the emergence of feminism and women's (not to be confused in various authors' points out) filmmaking in the early 1970s and the various structures and circumstances that arose to support it. "Though some debates are stronger than others, the part of the book is a welcome contribution to current debates on the film industry, and will serve for a long time as a reference work on these issues which have not before been gathered together so comprehensively."

Annette Bloch provides a lucid account of the notion of independence and its relation to the movement as a background to the subsequent chapters which consider women's feminist filmmaking as a subgroup of independent film. Then follow two companion articles on the Women's Film Fund (WFF). Anne Crewe concentrates on the changing ideologies that informed its operation through the seventies and into the eighties, and Jean Thewlis poses issues about its future. "In there is a purpose for the WFF in the 1990s, or in its existence as an institution, is left over from the aftermath of 1970s government intervention and radical feminism" (p.64). The section as a whole raises the question as to whether women's feminist filmmaking will continue to be a subgroup of the independent sector (and what of the women's right) or whether it will recognise a separate relation to the so-called mainstream.

This question is also posed by Noreen Freedman's article on the Sydney Women's Film Unit as the section on tracking Her Boxes and through providing artful statistics it clear how very difficult things will be for women... claimed to be marginal if we don't have things like the WFF, because of lack of skills and experience, claimed if we do, to continue ghettoisation within "women's cinema". The terrible question that hangs over all the analysis is: what are the options for women filmmakers in the present time? Is it to be "Yankee Peter Wicks", as one film worker quoted by Freedman put it (p.96), or is it to continue the system of short films on "women's issues"? How can women's filmmakers manage and the mainstream cultural world manage it, as women feature directors so far have been forced to do, for the most part. It makes one reflect again on the tragedy of the failure of the low-budget feature program at the Australian Film Commission, which would have allowed several women to make the leap into feature-length projects. On the other hand one can be contemptuous with joy that these of the most innovative recent Australian films from my source have come out of women's filmmaking — *My Life Without Me*, *A Song Of Cleopatra* and *Jasmin's House*.

This brings me to what was for me the most exciting part of the book — the section on "critical analysis". This is a collection of extended pieces of criticism, of varied quality, of most key works of women's filmmaking. The weakest is the one on Gillian Armstrong, but this I believe reflects the comparative lack of interest of Armstrong's career when viewed alongside works like *Fe* (Dame) *Day* and *For Love Of Money*.

Most of the pieces in this section, especially those of Freda P

• *Fathers*, are beautifully written, combining a sophisticated historical awareness with an accessible and pleasurable style. Barbara Creed's appreciation of *My Life Without Me* and its inscription by feminist author and her extremely illuminating analysis of the aesthetic and theoretical impulses behind *A Song Of Cypress* were the most rewarding for me. I also enjoyed Carissa Moore's piece on *For Love Or Money*, *We Were The Pictures* and *Seven*. Unfortunately, both Carissa Hastings although I disagreed with much of what she said and with the rather prescriptive view of history and the culture through which she views these films. The exciting thing about the writings is that the level of vigorous and engaged intellectual criticism of Australian cinema is always without pretension, though people have been calling for it for years. That section shows how fruitful it is when done well.

Presumably, the least interesting aspect of the book for me is the one called *Personal Statements*. Only those of *Carissa Hastings*, an advantage because of its length, and *Helen Green*, who treated it as an opportunity to be both informative and self-narratively literary, really grab attention. It is interesting to speculate on all the reasons, feminist self-affirmation and the like, that might have persuaded for the most part such comparatively bland personal statements. In fact the statements are not personal, they are merely auto-biographical.

The editors and authors of this indispensable book are to be congratulated on their honesty in giving this well presented volume published, with financial assistance from the Women's Film Fund. Let's hope it receives the serious discussion it deserves and that productive new directions for women's film making emerge.

Liz Reeks

## LOVE IS COLDER THAN DEATH — The Life And Times Of Rainer Werner Fassbinder

By Robert Katz and Peter Biering

(Jonathan Cape/Australian Publishing Company, 1987  
ISBN 0 224 012174 5 Hbk. \$28.95 np)

RAINER Werner Fassbinder, according to Robert Katz, was a "wastrel, manipulative, glutinous, time-consuming pickled-ham wine, despair or because of this, charred meat of these Beypons 1960 and 1980." The promiscuous output was matched by a massive input of alcohol, nicotine, cocaine and sex which only Death, the eternal party pooper, could fit in. A spectacularly unsympathetic character, you might say, but it was all part of the Fassbinder plan: "Grow up and work. Then, and only then, let them die...". I was so ugly on the cover of *Time*! And the Fassbinder fascination: "He was gaudy, over-ripe,—" rhapsodies Iris Hamanaka, a secondary-careerist reading her former lover's obituary, "We're so big he was beautiful." Be warned that neither biographer nor any of the Fassbinder "people" shapes any sense of longing for the striking敏锐ness or the thrilling cheek. It's that sort of book.

In *Prussiafrica* it is written that RWF never got the way he did. The product of a broken home, as they say, the Hoyt Ozarks found himself living on prostitute row with Mother and her 17-year-old love. Then Mom married a writer of short stories. Fassbinder would call on them "now in awe with a mixture of horror as a writer" (Adam) for at 19 RWF had found that he was A. Brechtman: "He had a very, very heavy childhood," his mother later explained.

Fassbinder made his first film, a 10-Dramme educational statement, at 20. More importantly, he began "filling his life with followers in order to make movies, then making movies to fill his life with followers". He needed a family — no substitute for the nonexistential one he was born into. The callousness with which he ruled the family is reminiscent of both the incisive happy movement and the manicure *Chinatown*. Having recovered his non-belonging RWF was in good position to become the new man in the New German Cinema. In a very few years he could be its chief villain.

The rapid transition from promising type to bankable name should, you would think, make an interesting study: the relationship between art and power, art and money expected to dominate cultural processes. After all, a biography is more than just a reconstruction (deconstruction?) for the fans. Isn't it? With the

rise and rise of RWF, however, Katz only gives us crumbs. Never does he allow scholarship to stand in the way of good gossip. Regrettably, as it undermines the whole concept of film literacy — imagine, perhaps.

Meanwhile, back with the bo, history "was getting gamey and programmatic with the times of 1980" (Götz Gidy). Andreas Baader and his crew were beginning to take matters into their own hands. One of their first acts was to destroy the Action Theatre where Fassbinder had been based. Significantly, it was neither political nor symbolic but an act of personal revenge as RWF's new bandy Fassbinder himself enjoyed the strength of the Baader group. And if judge from the critical response to his work, Fassbinder could fairly lay claim to being a terrorist of the artsform. The again Katz is unposed by wider cultural considerations. He means to give us the dirt.

The anomaly, evident in the Baader case, between professed and private reader is present in Fassbinder's *Therapy*. From the outset his chaotic personal life was spectacularly bound up with his art. Not only were lovers out, sometimes in clandestine roles, but the director also appeared in *Heimatkino* novels. *Die Farben Der Freunde* he himself. Even his mother got a guest role. All were tortured. And if RWF demanded loyalty he gave out. Dashed with the tag-line of tragic-grocery (Kurt Baasch was Baasch). Peter Fassbinder's people fell in and out of love with their director. Somehow the films were made. So remember the group that before long Fassbinder was making films about making films.

These bits of shooting war, decorated general, are a bit like Greek tragedy. The audience knows exactly how it will end. The dramatic interest lies in the protagonist's skill in getting off the mattock. RWF's skill there was his addiction to the blunted drama of creation and fame. The American critics' bewilderment because for him it was "the only one that has remained so authentic". On a visit to a New York gay bar the Fassbinder people were asked at the aspernal excess of the New World. "This is of course," remembers Helmut Pratke fondly, "was the famous first word heard about but never seen before, and we were quite taken with it." Fassbinder was playing double fassbinder with his peers. Fassbinder was system and his longings expressed by his critics were dismissed as the usual cults of mediocrity. "Everyone must decide for himself whether it is better to have a brief but more intense life existence or to live a long and ordinary life."

I will say this for Robert Katz's biography. When Death finally puts the plug on Rainer Werner Fassbinder it's a relief. Despite its patchy research and its huge holes the life is surely involving. Describably fascinating. While it is not in the same class as the biographies of Iris Christian and John Betjeman there is common to them all the sense of history being punctured. There is also not a little spite as we participate in a game of Kick the Corps. In Fassbinder's case the vital function is performed for us by Kurt Baasch, "a tall, slender woman, fair beauty with fat but diminished by middle age" (I) like statues a death mask. "The body was rolled in on a sort, and laid out on a marble slab. I was left alone... They'd removed his brain... I couldn't get used to his being dead... Every now and then, workers came into the room, gave dugers. They were joking about him. One of them said, 'No man's organ for the Foundation, right?' This is completed the revenge of the living.

Simon Hughes



LOVE IS COLDER THAN DEATH Fassbinder directs

## BOOKS RECEIVED

**WALT DISNEY'S FANTASIA** John Culbard (Abacus/Pan/Australian Publishing Company, 1987, \$16, ISBN 0 349 38038 9)  
• A comprehensive, enthusiastic celebration of the creation of the Disney movie, illustrated with character sketches, storyboard, paintings and animation frames.

**THE GOLDEN AGE OF FRENCH CINEMA 1929-1938** John W. Martin (Columbus/Australian Publishing Company, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8527 2111 1), **LUCHINO VISCONTI** Cesare Torrisi (Columbus/Australian Publishing Company, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8527 2112 9), **FEDERICO FELLINI: VARIETY LIGHTS TO LA DOLCE VITA** Frank Bunker (Columbus/Australian Publishing Company, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8527 2113 7), **ROMAN POLANSKI** Virginia Wrightizian (Columbus/Australian Publishing Company, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8527 2114 5)

• Four more titles in the Columbus Filmseries series, reference works on major directors and filmaking trends designed to appeal to both general readers and film students.

**THE FILMS OF STEVEN SPIELBERG** Ned Sherrill (Golden Press/Melbourne, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8628 3328 0)

• A look at Spielberg's film career, from his first short, where a stagiraute robbery (made at the age of 12) to *The Color Purple*. Illustrated with more than 145 colour pictures.

**LAUREL AND HARDY: CLOTH PRINCES OF COMEDY** Bruce Ceronier (Columbus, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8527 2144 4)

• Over-priced illustrated paperback version of the film career of Stan and Ollie. With bibliography.

**GEORGE GERSHWIN** Alan Kendall (Morrison/Australian Publishing Company, 1987, \$19.95, ISBN 0 8527 2145 2)

• The biographer of David Gurnick explores the work, life and times of America's favorite popular composer.

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Imm La Douce	[Perry]	\$18.99

## READINGS — SOUTH YARRA

153 Toorak Road — 387 1485 (books, LPs, CDs, Cassettes)  
4777 High Avenue — 264 3377 (Secondhand LPs & Cassettes)  
Mail Order: P.O. Box 424, South Yarra, Vic 3141

We are always interested in purchasing collections of recordings.

Robert Katz with Peter Berling

# LOVE IS COLDER THAN DEATH

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# CHIP THRILLS

For anyone who's wondered about DAT, PCM, kHz and SPL,  
FRED HARDEN demystifies digital sound.



HOW IT'S DONE: Steve Ganis explains

**WHILE WE** still have the same pair of analog ears, subject to the vagaries of age and health, we have now moved into the era of digital audio.

If you have done any sound work for TV recently, you will have encountered the term PCM. Having used PCM tracks for re-stringing audio tracks for commercials, I knew that PCM (Pulse Code Modulation) is the most common method of digitally recording sound. Examining the PCM process allows us to cover most of the current and future uses of digital audio recording and reproduction.

## EXISTING TECHNIQUE VS. THE FUTURE

We are comfortable with the analog approach to film sound which involves the chain of a microphone, preamplifier, tape recorder, mag tape transfer, multitrack (film or tape) mix, optical sound negative, to final optical print. Processes such as Dolby encoding have dramatically increased the quality at each step of the

process, but there are still restrictions on the dynamic range, distortion, signal loss, and noise inherent in analog sound.

A digital alternative to the film sound sequence would be limited by the fact that conventional film processes require analog methods for much of the chain of events. From microphone to preamplifier is always an analog signal, although a number of people are using PCM for backup digital location recording in circumstances, at least until we see the last of the Omega Audio Tape (DAT) former machines.

Time-coded film systems that speed up syncing of rushes are available, but most editors find back-on-thefilm the location sound to magnetic film. There is no way that the traditional methods would be encoded digitally at these stages. We will have to wait for some of the new editing systems such as Lucasfilm's Caledon, where the sync rushes are

transferred to video disc and then played back on multiple laser disc players controlled by a computer.

Until then, digital will be used only at the multitrack mix where the master is digital. This would be used to make the optical sound neg or produce the magnetic stripe tracks.

## VIDEO AUDIO GOES DIGITAL

The biggest and most immediate changes offered by digital sound will be to TV, videotape and video or film series for TV, where the image and sound are cut on video and the digital audio tapes can be synchronized and laid up on the multitrack for that mix. Then the stereo digital master would be transferred to the new digital VTRs (Video Tape Recorders) as the final release clubs could be digital sound.

## THE RECORDING PROCESS

The conventional analog

process records the original audio signal as variations in the magnetization of recording tape. This comes with the inherent problems of replicating the recording accurately and, with copies, degradation and irregularities of the original signal. Wow and flutter, distortion, signal loss, noise from the tape and the processing equipment all come with the process.

Digital tape recording will involve the same problems in processing the signal but it breaks the continuous waveform into discrete pulses. All audio waveforms have two main features: the amplitude of the wave (its height and depth) and time (how many waves go past a point in a certain period).

The digital system operates by separating time into very short segments, dictated by a crystal-controlled clock. The actual number of segments is called the sampling rate. With each segment, the waveform voltage is sampled at that moment by an analog-to-digital converter and a digital

number is generated that shows what the actual voltage was at that moment. This turns the continuous waveforms into a series of steps approximating the original waveform, as can be seen in the diagram below.

Most samples will make the digital signal match the analog signal more accurately, but after a certain point this becomes much more difficult and expensive, and the quality increase is difficult to detect. The digital audio system that most of us are familiar with is Compact Disc. The sampling rate for CDs is 44.1 kHz. Audio purists say that the best conventional analog systems can achieve the same high frequency response as CDs but the fact that digital information is recorded as either off or on bits of information means there is no room for the 'maybe' or 'almost' signals that are heard as background noise.

To increase even the simplest of audio signals requires a massive amount of data about it, and while computers are used to handling and storing this information onto floppy or hard disk, the rotary time needed is much slower than for computer text etc. Digital recording on a standard tape recorder requires an increase in the speed of the tape past the heads, a change in the tape heads, and the tape itself.

A simpler method uses the wide bandwidth available with the rotary heads of video tape recording systems to record the digital audio signal in place of the picture signal information. This means that almost any Video 8mm, VHS or Beta half-inch, or U-matic video cassette recorder can be used as a digital tape deck. All that is required is a PCM converter that feeds a (spares if required) digitized signal to the VCR. The same device decodes the signal for transfer to the master tracks later.

## LIMITATIONS

Stationary head recorders offer several advantages over rotary heads. Because cassette are used for rotary design this means that electronic editing is necessary. It is difficult to 'drop in', and because the stereo tracks are multiplexed (mixed) into a single recorded video track it is difficult to work on just one left or right signal.

Stationary heads also make it easier to record and playback for synchronous tracks, important for professional multitrack recording. This same argument has been echoed by the current development of the soon to be-released DAT recorders for the domestic market, where S-DAT and R-DAT (stationary and rotary) systems have been developed.

The biggest advantage of PCM recording on video equipment is cost. It is possible to have the highest quality production audio for well under \$2000 if half-inch equipment is used. Existing video synchronising equipment used in edit suites can control audio editing as well. One of the best examples I've seen of PCM used in this fashion is Frame Set & Match, a Sydney offline edit facility.

## FRAME SET & MATCH

Steve Dunn and Richard Schweihs, both ex-Teleplay editors, have set up a small editing facility that I believe is ideal in size and cost-effective. They have an Australian ABC editor controller handling three Sony U-Matics, a Sony Betacam, and a small mixer. While a lot of their work is corporate low

band work, they have the ability and enthusiasm to push the capabilities of the system. I asked Steve what prompted the PCM purchase and how it was used.

"The reason that we jumped onto it was because it just has such lovely sound. And suddenly for \$2000 you can have such uncompromising audio quality. It seems made for the lower quality formats — you can record it on Betacam and one-inch but you can't time-base correct it for replay. Our major use of PCM is generated from the Betacam. Of the video production for TV today, 10 per cent is on one-inch and 90 per cent on Betacam. After the initial learning stages with Betacam audio tracks, a lot of production is now being done using the Dolby audio tracks of the Betacam. They still use a sound recordist working conventionally with a boom etc, and processing the audio through the mixer, while making a safety copy on quarter-inch.

"It goes quarter-inch tapes need to be used, the best method we've come across is recording a burst of the time code from the Betacam at the beginning of the scene onto the quarter-inch. When you come back to the edit suite, we can dub a PCM U-matic from it by feeding the audio

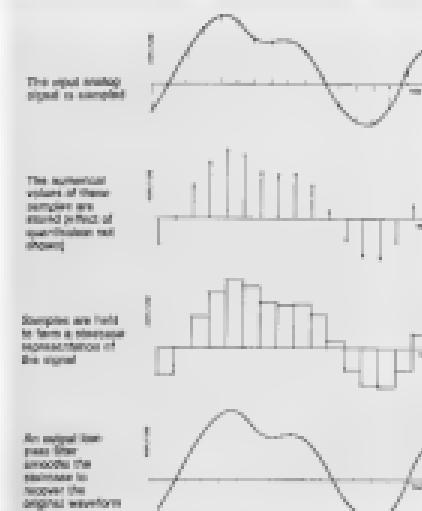
signal at the same time into the time-code reader. The reader doesn't read to the audio until it hits the section of timecode, starts counting and, when it cuts out, continues to supply code from that point. It is then an easy matter to sync with the edit computer to the Betacam master.

"Sports Group from Kennedy Miller is a good example of PCM use. They are doing eight one-hour programs, it's a massive shoot — about 1000 Beta tapes. At 20 minutes each, that's a lot of material.

"They do a rough 'punch and branch' assembly of the material, and then bring it here to punch up. So we end up with an edit event list and all the numbers on floppy discs ready for the CMS. That's not particularly original as at that point there is no extra work to do on the sound. The system is then automatic when you come to sync up the sound. All the numbers are there when you are ready to lay tracks up to the multitrack for the mix.

"The process goes like this. The Dolby tracks are decoded to one or more PCM-U-matics. When they walked into the online, which they have just finished, they didn't have to think about the audio. In a 500-hour edit suit you shouldn't be thinking about audio. You laid up the whole series on PCM. We fed the edit list in, and, because all the time codes are the same, we could edit up the different tracks. We would look at the list and if there were dissolves we would pull them out, make it 50 frames longer, either and which takes a few seconds on the computer and watch it assemble onto the cassettes. Because you can't get at the stereo tracks once they are on PCM, you can flip it on alternative tracks to make things easier on the sound editor left/right/left/right — it's a matter of choice. Then if you suddenly get overlapping audio you just fit on another cassette with the same code. It was all properly sound checked and they were sort of getting four tracks. We laid up the 100 per cent sound, additional 'stereo' and it was all so easy.

"On the 8mm it's different. We have worked where the masters are all telecine-transferred to quarter. Before we even start editing we select the tracks onto a selected master roll. A list of these are then sent to the neg »



THIS DIAGRAM DRAWS ON TIME SAMPLING. Top: A band-limited signal can be sampled and reconstructed without loss.



FRAME-SET &amp; MATCH: The act of

cutters who assemble the whole takes in the same order as we have. But when they start doing their audio, they seem to make it really difficult for themselves. I've seen them trying to synchronise the ring leaders to sync using the cassette image. It's so much easier with video when the numbers are all there.

Half-inch VCRs seem to have some problems with PCM. Big droops are worse on the smaller tape and I do

know that a few people who had been using half-inch PCs had to back up on instead of on Nagras (using the original P1 portable PCM unit that unfortunately Sony took off the market). They've stopped using the VHS machines and have gone back to Nagras. General Sound was also backing up their masters on PCM VHS and have gone over to 4-inch as it seems to have some problems; it may have just been only bad stock,

I don't know. On the other hand we've seen some people using the Video 8 for their backups, set the PCM Video 8 model but recording PCM in the Video 8 vision tracks. What has happened on Sports Coat is really as a revolution in video audio, and it can't help but become the best way to work. And we are trying to convince clients that it's just as good for commercial. It's faster and it saves money.

# THE BEGINNERS GUIDE TO SOUND

## SOUND

Sound starts with a vibration of an object. A string or plucked tuning fork creates air which creates the air next to it, compressing the normally uniformly distributed air molecules into vibrating waves of dense areas of air pressure followed by lower than normal areas. One sequence of compression and rarefaction is called a cycle and the number of these returning cycles that pass a fixed point in a second is called the frequency of that sound. The measurement of this frequency is in Hertz (Hz) or cycles per second.

The amplitude of that sound is the amount of pressure displacement above and below the level of the normal air that is shown on a graph as the height of the wave and depth of the trough above the horizontal axis.

## MEASUREMENT

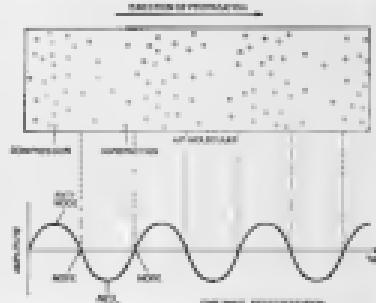
The range of human hearing is usually given as 20Hz to 20,000Hz (or 20 millisecond window MS). To give you some idea of the size of that range, consider that a 20Hz signal has a wavelength more than 30 feet long and the 20,000Hz is about half an inch. It is easy to imagine that one of the processes that change the sound pressure into electrical signals (such as microphones) can handle the range without affecting some parts of the audible range. This is where the term 'flat' response refers to the device's ability to leave the range of sound unchanged. Few recording instruments have a flat response over the full range. (Carries from these is that response, the greatest sensitivity is in the 3 to 4 kHz range.)

Sound pressure depends on the particle displacement in the air and this is very small. In a normal conversation the particle displacement is only about one-thousandth of an inch. A football sized car would still only be about one-thousandth of an inch. The pressure of the atmosphere is measured in micro-

bars which is the same order as we have. But when they start doing their audio, they seem to make it really difficult for themselves. I've seen them trying to synchronise the ring leaders to sync using the cassette image. It's so much easier with video when the numbers are all there.

Half-inch VCRs seem to have some problems with PCM. Big droops are worse on the smaller tape and I do

I don't know. On the other hand we've seen some people using the Video 8 for their backups, set the PCM Video 8 model but recording PCM in the Video 8 vision tracks. What has happened on Sports Coat is really as a revolution in video audio, and it can't help but become the best way to work. And we are trying to convince clients that it's just as good for commercial. It's faster and it saves money.



CATCH A WAVE: Wave propagation



SOUND PRESSURE LEVELS: From the sounds of silence to the noise that annoys

0dB: The threshold of hearing for most people is 0.0002 microbar. A microbar is equal to one-millionth of normal atmospheric pressure so you can see how sensitive to the subtle changes of pressure the ear is. If it were any more sensitive you could hear the motion of air molecules produced by heat. Shaking a match would produce not only the motion of the match on the box but the heat of the

flame and crackle of burning wood, but the sound of the heated air around it.

Decibels: The ear operates over an energy range of 1,000,000,000,000 to 1. It was necessary to find a way to make all these levels workable in calculations and formulas. A logarithmic scale with a base of 10 has been adopted. The above range would then be written 10<sup>12</sup> to 1.

## MEASURING SOUND

The unit of measurement of sound energy or the Sound Pressure Level (SPL) is called the decibel (dB). Taking the lowest level we can see pressure 0dB, we go through the range up to the level of hearing or discomfort at about 100dB to jet engine (but about 120dB to cause the damage in Sound Pressure Level for instance). The jet engine uses 110dB — the increase is only 3dB (that is still a 21 increase, otherwise that is a logarithmic increase). There are a lot more decibels attached to the actual measured pressure difference from the second chapter.

That's not really confusing when you consider a typical example of a domestic fan. The formula for calculating dB to dB = 10log<sup>2</sup> (P1/P2) where P1 and P2 are values of acoustic or electric power, such as watts. If you are trying to choose between two amplifiers, one with 40 watts and one and the other with 80 watts, your ears will hardly be able to tell the difference. By using the above formula if you've got this fan, you will see just the difference = 10log (80/40) = 10log 1.5 = 10 x 1.5 = only 1.5dB. Because the maximum level change that your ears can perceive is 1dB, the increase you hear from the more powerful amplifier will be only slight.

## OTHER FACTORS

Many factors influence how sound is heard, initially and when it is recorded. Attenuation of the sound takes place even as it travels through air. The sharp high frequencies of a nearby thunderclap is attenuated to a low rumble as the sound comes from further away. (Sudden temperature affects the way the sound is reflected. If bands around objects, diffuse when it passes through small openings, and sound energy is reflected or absorbed by other surfaces of objects).

"The future for film is with systems like the CMX 8000, where you have vision and sound on separate laser discs. The mag is transmited to laser video disc 'master' and the edit is done completely by computer. As a conclusion in terminology to the film editor, edits are called 'splices'. The system can be not only time code but edge numbers and the final list can go to the mag cutter. Because it uses fast access

laser discs with multiple heads, the edit is never committed to tape and can be 'trimmed' and adjusted by single frames, just like film, without having to then re-read from that point again. It all remains in the computer memory so you can play around with different versions of the scene. And all the audio can be handled the same way. It sounds terrific and I hope it comes soon." DAT's all talk.

## AUDIO TERMS



**GETTING YOUR DIGITAL BEARINGS:** A bucket of water and a bucket of ball bearings illustrate some of the differences between analog and digital information.

### DIGITAL AND ANALOG

The textbook explanation (quoting Maxine's analogy) of the difference between analog and digital information involves the comparison between a glass filled with water and a glass filled with marbles. The analog water can be measured or quantified by weighing the glass and water, pouring out the water and finding the weight of the water alone. When pouring out the water, a little sticks to the glass and if it is telling you cannot measure it.

With the "digital" marbles we can count the marbles and par-

ticle the volume of the glass from the number it holds. Having "digital" marbles can also be repeated as often as you like and even if you lose one, you already know the shape and size of the marble and can replace it. Digital audio uses clever error checking processes that can replace the gaps in data caused by tape dropouts etc. You will never hear them, unless they are massive.

One of the best books I've found on this subject is *Principles Of Digital Audio*, by Ken C. Pohlmann, from which the illustrations in this article were taken.



**HILLS AND PARAPETS:** Analog and digital signals are two methods of representing information.

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## NEW ZEALAND BY MIKE NICOLAI

### TO THE RESCUE

The experience of the 10-week shoot of the offshoot *With Disney Touches Film's* producer, *The Rescuers*, may clarify what has been a thorny problem in local industry attitudes.

It also might signal a more collaborative approach between segments of the industry in the decade ahead.

As in Australia and elsewhere, the issue of offshore production in all its guises has been a source of tension in the indigenous feature industry. It raises over the costs of cultural exportation and the exploitation of local resources and talent. It can divert local private investment away from the home product.

In New Zealand, where economic constraints are likely to keep local features to about five a year, the debate can have wide ramifications. This happened in 1984 when *New Zealand Action*, Equity's picked and generally financed a co-producer, mounted by New Zealand and overseas interests but with a heavy US bias on the cast list. Public schedules also suffered on a number of other "imports" in those few years of boom production when film features, through the use of limited resource leases, were lucrative business for dealmakers and many shareholders.

The government finally clamped down on the film environment soon from 1 October 1984. The subsequent centralized Reserve Departmental administration of special film partnerships operating at the 1980-84 period, and the resultant peace in all future filmmaking in the country is

1985 and 1986, has helped settle disputes and reduce some tensions.

Many actors and most film technicians began to think that another groundbreaking was off very well. But the peace was work and some continuity of employment.

In a back-handed way, a more positive atmosphere also was engendered by the David Lange Labour government. Employing more than 10,000, it encouraged less cringe and greater courage and collaboration by taking advantage of diversity between industry segments and not according to any one method of industry stimulation through the tax system.

*The Rescuers* was a watershed in local industry attitudes, even 1987, as shown by what took place during the months of pre-production, and the shoot which concluded in Auckland in late June.

The difference between the Disney project and previous overseas productions was this: it was the first fully collaborative film.

It had a big budget of \$30,000,000-\$35,000,000. The story dealt with a group of Australian immigrants who rescued their son's soldier father from a North Korean prison fortress.

Disney wanted to bring in at least 15 performers, hire CAPTAIN aircraft for aerial action sequences, and convert Whangaparai base near Auckland into a US base in Korea.

The government was available. The Independent Producers and Distributors Guild (IPDG), particularly in the person of its president, John Michael (Mike) Barrett, was strongly in favour of the project. There was work in the film, at rates well above those for local features for members of the New Zealand Film and Video Technicians' Guild (NZFTVG).

David Giacconno, chairman of the NZC Film Commission, said he would not like to compartmentalise work in the interests of the local industry. However, as long as there was reciprocity between the country and New Zealand money was not involved, he was not anxious against it.

Disney has subsequently claimed the Queenstown location shoot as "the biggest international news in the [New Zealand's] South Island in recent memory". Fifty local technicians were employed to build sets and 300 obtained roles as extras. In addition, several animal wranglers, animal handlers and train people were hired. For the three-week Auckland shoot another 300 extras were employed.

The only section of the local industry unhappy about Disney's arrival was Actors' Equity, whose internal debate was mounting over its policy that there be no more than two extras actors for any film made in New Zealand. The membership also was bound by the policy of the Federation of International Actors that offshore firms must pay local actors what they would pay in their own at home.

In the words of Josephine Gibson, Equity national secretary, the extended and difficult negotiations with Disney finally provided the catalyst for policy change.

For the few New Zealanders with specialist roles in *The Rescuers*, rates were settled at a margin above those for non-local film stars below US Screen Actors' Guild rates translated into New Zealand dollars. (The minimum rate struck is understood to have been \$34,000 a day and \$40,000 a week.)

The deal also involved Equity's relinquishing its requirement on the number of extras actors for any wholly-funded offshore production coming in, and Disney's agreement to pay a levy of 5% of gross actors' budget — estimated between \$14,000,000 and \$16,000,000. Originally Equity sought a percentage of the gross budget, but without the support of technicians, it accepted the Disney actors' budget-only counteroffer.

In the end, the film Hollywood major that could become the producer and relying point for all segments of the industry in the future.

Although the IPDG has seemed antagonistic to any form of levy on offshore production, this would not necessarily be the case if offshore

productions began competing on a regular basis for local personnel and units.

At the George Lucas-Run Howard fantasy film *Willow* checked into Queenstown following the Disney departure, the rotted national door was open, and actors always would give priority to work on a local film (presumably at lower "local" rates) because a studio stranded.

While the NZC Film Commission, officially poised between the government and the industry, officially sits on the fence, there are churning within.

The personal view of executive director Jim Smith is that offshore productions come to New Zealand because of low crew rates and the great natural locations.

It is hoped they should pay some form of fee. Many countries in fact do charge a production levy, he says.

Mike Wernigan, chairman of the NZFTVG, believes a location levy used to produce training of local technicians and artists could be advantageous and should be fully debated within the industry.

Meanwhile, Equity's Gibson has not shied establishing a shareholder trust to handle the Disney money. She says it will be up to the Equity membership, about 800, to decide what a deal is done with it — perhaps, film production training for actors, or acting training generally.

Whether *Willow* follows Disney's lead appears problematic at the time of writing. *Willow*, who only recently recruited Susan Cudlitz as the key Equity post, says: "The problem with *Willow* is that local negotiations were badly handled and there has been virtually no communication."

Very few, if any, New Zealand actors will be employed. Starving Nasip, NZ production manager, speaks of "about \$2,000,000" to be ploughed into the Queenstown region, and 80 Kiwis already employed in crew and associated jobs.

Deep industry consideration of a levy may therefore be postponed until after *Willow* winds and before the next arrival.

Meanwhile, Vincent Ward's *The Navigator*, postponed from last year and the first co-production between the New Zealand and Australian film commissions, began a one-week shoot on 20 July. It has a mix of New Zealanders shot with featured actors from both countries and Canada. A blend of indigenous and offshore that could become contagious.



Anthony Buckley

## THE MINISERIES: the big budget on the small screen

"I DON'T think there's any future in the miniseries," says network producer Anthony Buckley. "I'm not convinced the way networks program our drama suits the viewer at all."

Buckley has just completed his second miniseries, *Poet Man's Orange*, and he says for a cost, placing any more. He feels the format is too restrictive, too expensive and unfair on the audience.

"I think that miniseries aren't for the cleverer either," says Buckley. "Because of costs you have to shoot seven minutes a day. The viewer is expecting better film quality and you don't really give them that because of the economy."

Buckley may be less enthusiastic about the format but he and director George Whaley are delighted with the result. *Poet Man's Orange* is the sequel to their adaptation of Ruth Park's bestselling novel *The Harp in the South*, and it continues the story of inner-city, postwar Buckley and the battle Davies of 108 Plymouth St, a poor working-class family of tough trek stock living among the tenement houses, slums, garages, factories and sky-grabbing shapes of Sydney's North Shore in the late 1940s.

It is a story of struggle and triumph, and if there's a slightly melodramatic tone beginning in *Orange* — then that was inevitable. This series, like its predecessor, is pure melodrama. That's not to undermine Whaley's

achievement. The performances develop Park's earthy Aussi archetypes into flesh and blood characters, when they could have easily become caricature. Humdrum, authentic and expressive, at Buckley's production, there's a sense of the blunted pathoslessness of other melodramatic miniseries. It's not a accident that we still get a few series of a period, even though the seven makes no attempt to deal directly with major historical events. It's in spite of the constraints of the family saga narrative. Whaley was able to interpret [broaden] the lies into the emotional drama, even as the task proved frustrating.

"I am personally interested in the social and political environment and the effect those things have on people," says Whaley. "Of course we did vast amounts of research on riots and *Poet Man's*. We make passing references to the political events of the time — the strikes and mass immigrations, and we deal with the issue of housing — communistic blocks in *Poet Man's*. But to treat them properly — and I tried — you'd have to write another story. If you didn't fit. We were doing the books, and while our vision changes, the narrative has got to be there. I think Harry and *Poet Man's* will educate a lot of people that perhaps things haven't changed much for a lot of people."

Whaley had never directed film or television before Buckley offered

him the miniseries project. He is best known for his work in the theatre as an actor, director, producer, teacher and writer, but Buckley has adapted Harry and wrote the script with Helenette Wiscombe as well as adapting and directing *Poet Man's Orange*. His stage production of *Steely Rudd's On Our Selection* set box office records and now Buckley wants to make a new feature film version (not a remake) of Raymond Longfellow's 1928 classic, or *Rent*. Hell's 1932 pillar version with literary writing and dancing subtlety is something fresh and new. He knows the Victorian melodrama of his stage adaptations would be low box office gross. The new film will be a different story, comedy, capers and romances. *Call Steve Field with a modern audience!*

"I think it can," says Buckley. "I went to see *Cooper's* production at the National very recently. I thought 'Good Lord how will this week in 1988 be?' Well, I was wrong. It was a mixed audience of young people and old, and they loved it. It played to packed houses. It's extraordinary, that success in *Paradise* and authors like Steely Rudd and Henry Lawson (I think there's a great identification out there) and I think the big networks miss the point."

Buckley believes that the networks let spending too much money on overseas product in an effort to make ratings. They seem to think that viewers do not want to see themselves, despite the success of local ministries and dramas like *Visions: A Country Practice*, *Refford's Rules* and *The Ringers* in *The South*.

He also believes that networks should take a long hard look at

their programming, pointing out the advantages of the British system, where commercials are screened every 25 minutes.

"We know they're on for five or more minutes and it gives drama a chance," he says. "It's something that should be looked at in Australia." He feels that an hour screened weekly, as was the case with *The Jewel* in *The Crown* and *Prudie Suspended*, is satisfying for viewers.

Buckley, who produced *Castles*, *The Intruder*, *The Ringers*, *On Angel Street* and *Bliss*, has three major projects: a documentary series in preparation. These include an adaptation of Robin Denselow's *Tools*, with the director of *Bliss*, Guy Lawrence.

He is concerned that there is still an audience for local product. His biggest fear is the possibility of deregulation in the TV industry.

"Deregulation is where you're talking about commercials being imported and the reduction of local content — that has to be fought tooth and nail. The networks want self regulation and if they are allowed to do that under the present ownership conditions, it will spell the end for the Australian TV industry."

"It must be narrowed down the government's [thesis] that we would not be sitting here talking to you now if it weren't for the 1986 regulation when television was first introduced — that commercials had to be made in Australia. Out of that came an Australian film industry."

"Look at the people who have come out of commercials: Ray Lawrence, Peter Weir, Fred Schepisi, Bruce Beresford, Paul Haggis. If we're going to deregulate, we're losing a national treasure."

Peter Weir's *Orange*





























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- When do we celebrate Greta Garbo's birthday?
- On what date was the premiere of *The Sentimental Bloke*?

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# FILM BUFF'S DIARY

SEPTEMBER

**1** 1930 The Five Film Corporation buys a controlling interest in the studio. The studio and its name change to the Five Alhambra studios in 1931 and back to RKO in 1934.

**2** 1939 Arthur E. Aleng director of photography (1934 Co-Director) 1950 Peter Tark 1950 born Moscow

**3** 1950 Alessandro Tamburi, cofounder (1934) 1950 Carlo Lanza 1950 Mario Ohry 1950 Wilson A. Stevens 1950 The Pioneers 1954 Zimmerman & the Non-Stop 1958 Italy (Milan) (Milan)

**4** 1955 Cesare Attanasio, coproducer (1952) 1955 Lino Vittorio 1955 Renzo Marta 1956 Antonio Saccoccia 1956 Renzo Gonnella 1956 born Asti/Piemonte, Italy

**5** 1957 Renzo Sestini, Regia e Recita 1957 found family film in a series of the Interfilm 20 Francis (San Francisco), an event which will lead to the connected Reggio Poetry Anthology, awarding aids for the stage and cinema

**6** 1958 RIZZI Studios, Milan, 1958 Top film starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers



**7** 1959 Ed Kienzle (Edie Mann 1959) 1960, Director 1961 Awarded Oscar 1961 (On the Waterfront) 1961 born Koda-Koy, Istanbul

**8** 1970 Robert Nobby Cox 1970 starring member of the original Beatles Help! 1970 Phoenix, Arizona

**9** 1979 Drunken, Begone, on Chaplin's The Great Dictator

**10** 1981 Ruby Rebecca Littell 1981 director (1976 Sound Of Music 1980 Christmas 1984 New York After Dark 1987) born Carroll, New York

**11** 1983 Mario Giordano Meyer 1983, Stéphane Hébert 1983 Gross Quatre John Gennaro and Jean Chételat

**12** 1973 Valeria Bruni star of the Hopscotch, Country 1973 movies of Parkinson's disease and singer Mirella Leguizamón, Brazil, California

**13** 1983 Giovanna Pellegrini 1983 producer, Italian Filmoteca 1983 1983 in peace, died Capri (1984), near Milan, chair of Art, Italy

**14** 1983 HRH Princess Grace of Monaco 1983 screenwriter Diana Kelly 1983 in mysterious accident, Monaco

**15** 1984 Jean-Pierre Jeunet 1984 (Léon 1994) born Paris

**16** 1985 Dr. Alexander Korda 1985 (Cinéma Korda) director-producer (The Purple Line Of Henry VIII 1959) born Hungary

**17** 1989 Paul Poglay, presenter of sound effects in the *Dragon* project at Münchner Filmkunst

**18** 1990 Greta Garbo (Greta Garbo) 1990 Stockholm, Sweden

**19** 1992 Charles Chaplin 1992 (early career) 1992 recorded what he should have Queen Elizabeth II born London

**20** 1993 Cesare Zavattini 1993 (first appearance) 1993 (aspects of Seven Years) (Memento D 1992 Remains 1974) 1993 (Death Luzzu) Italy

**21** 1941 Carlo De Sica 1941 cinematographer (The Black Sheep 1979 The Right Stuff 1983 The Apartment 1960) born Philadelphia

**22** 1983 Athina Hagi 1983 one of Agnieszka Holland's latest cinematographers (The Sandcastle 1990 1993 On Our Sister's Wedding 1993) died Sydney



**23** 1984 Gary Oldman 1984 who provided the voice for the deer Shrek in Shrek & Shrek 2 (2001) born London

**24** 1986 Enrico Salizzato 1986 (as a copy of historical spectacles) 1986 (Quo Vult 1982) born Rome

**25** 1987 Friedman 1987 to Director 1988 (Suzanne Bon) Production of his last film starring Charlize Theron and Michael Eklund will take some four years and promises to become a 2001 Century-Fox hit

**26** 1988 Tom Jellicoe (producer) 1988 (Die Angry 2000 1989) born Sydney

**27** 1989 Athina Paliogi 1989 (Athina and Dysis 1987 Little Big Men 1992) born Paris, Greece

**28** 1990 Peter Finch 1990 (born London)

**29** 1991 Yves-André Gérard 1991 (producer) two known for his anti-war film *Paris, je t'aime* (1995) born Berlin

**30** 1992 First night audience sees *Central Park 5* (1991) directed by Michael Cimino, presented Broadway Theatre, New York

## O C T O B E R

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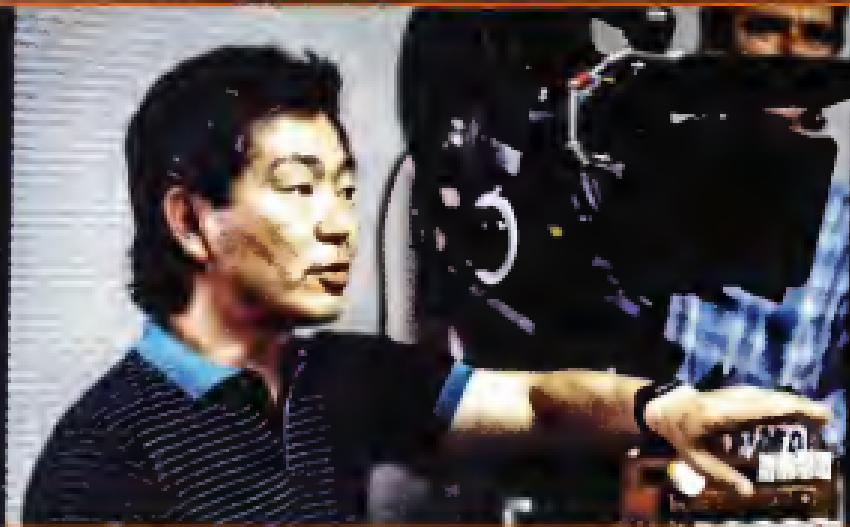
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HIRO NARITA,  
Director of Photography, *America*.

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I was able to use bold, simple lighting without sacrificing shadow detail or image sharpness. Night exteriors, which were dominated by a good portion of the film, were composed. The negative study ensured me the its capacity to hold detail while isolating such moments of extreme brightness as passing headlights or explosions.

As a Director of Photography, "I must know that what I see in front of the camera is what I'll get on the screen. AGFA XT 320™ with its improved video reproduction and sharpness assured me that. I counted on XT 320 and all of the 130000 feet I exposed delivered consecutive shot after shot, roll after roll."

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